

# *V* is for Vivian

Vengeance hath no  
fury...

Lawrence Burk



V is for Vivian

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## Introduction

From Vivian Bouvier's early years through her mid-twenties, she went by the name Vanessa Wakefield, an alias she assumed, to hide her identity and escape the painful memories of her youth. With either name, she easily went by Vee. She left the carnage of Castle Rouge behind her and assumed yet another identity to travel to Paris, the city of her dreams.

Young Vivian spent the past ten years planning and executing her revenge on a broken promise and now, with that debt paid, she was looking forward to a fresh start. Paris grew in her imagination as the City of Love, where she had hoped to spend all her days and looked forward to watching the sun rise with the promise of hope once more.

She traveled to Europe with friends, jet setting across Europe until she finally ended up in Paris. There, she had met a wealthy Parisian who owned a vineyard. She said goodbye to her friends and closest companion, to pursue the romantic dream she coveted. She was finally leaving the life of sex, lies, and deceit, to take another chance at love, and when she met Francois, for a moment in her tumultuous life, she felt safe and secure. He was charming, witty, and handsome.

Vivian thought she had found the secret to happiness, until Francois' dark side emerged. The problems of the world had not vanished, they followed her to the other side of the world. Francois was not the man she thought he was, and when their relationship became unstable and physical, her instincts released a dark warrior within her that gave her a new purpose in life. Thus, V the urban legend is born.

## Chapter One

The story begins in Vivian's massive and beautiful bedroom in the east wing of the Chateau de la Fontaine. Francois was in habit of sending her fresh flowers every morning obsessively for two months. Francois was a perfect gentleman and Vivian woke to a sunrise she only dreamt of as a child and just as dreams change, people change.

Francois walked into her room at seven o'clock; it was a beautiful spring morning, and the sunlight brightened the room like a scene in a movie, as he drew back the curtains. He whispered, "Wake up Vee," and held out the flowers.

Vivian spoke in her natural, smooth, New Orleans voice, "Francois, you shouldn't have. So many flowers." She smiled, trying to hide the feeling that she was property. Perhaps Francois had an inferiority complex, and compensated by overdoing things, but that wasn't the problem, his fault was, he drank too much. He owned a vineyard and loved his wine. He was usually calm and reserved while drinking, but on occasion, a ghost would appear from his emotional closet and a violent rage would overcome him.

"Francois, please don't take this wrong, I love the flowers, but it's quite too much, don't you think? I don't need all these flowers, to know how much you mean to me, I can see it in your eyes. Can I give some to the staff? They have taken such great care of me, or give some to the nursing home on Rue De L'abreuvoir?"

She couldn't have predicted he would react in anger; it was such a thoughtful and caring response. Out of nowhere, he raised his voice and barked at her, "so, you want to give away my gifts of love?!" The sound of his own voice made him even angrier.

“Hey, simmer down,” she said, “I think wanting to make people happy is a good thing, isn’t that why you give me the flowers in the first place?”

He wasn’t seeing her logic. His speech was slurred, compounded in French made his agreement incomprehensible. She stood in front of him in shock not knowing what to think or say. Suddenly, he caught her completely off guard by grabbing her by the hair and pulled her head back sharply. The last ten years of her life vanished, and in that instance, she found herself in the emotional state she was in, the first time she was sexually assaulted. She vowed she’d never be put in that situation again and knew she would have to stand and fight. The first time you’re violently manhandled by someone you’ve entrusted with your love, the heart breaks.

The image of his rage would never go away, she knew she couldn’t stay, and as much as she would want to get him back, she knew she wasn’t prepared. Vivian walked on eggshells for two days, thinking and planning her next move. She wasn’t hurting for cash, she had several million from her Castle Rouge days, in a Swiss bank. Vivian had always been a fighter and realized she needed help with the physical aspect. Recommended by a house servant, she enrolled in a martial arts class in the city. She put all her obsessive powers into learning and physically strengthening her body. After six weeks, she realized she needed something more, and she spoke with her trainer, “I need a different type of training.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“The type we’re not supposed to know about, the lethal type.” she replied.

Banks, short for Bankston, had a feeling he knew what she was suggesting, “Why would you what that, Vee?”

“I want to know everything that my opponent might know, I want to be prepared.”

Banks couldn't argue her logic, "Good answer, but you know this type of training does not come cheap?"

Vivian responded confidently, "I understand."

"Ok then, I know a guy, but I want you to know what you are getting into. Most people that go down that road get run over. Think about it for a couple of days. I'll call you before the weekend and if you're still interested, I should have a contact by then."

"Thank you, Banks."

He nervously replied, "Don't thank me, you don't know what I'm doing for you, this is dangerous stuff."

"Darling, I'm no stranger to danger, and I refuse to live in fear, I need this training,"

Banks saw a lot of potential in Vivian, but he was worried. "These people you meet, are psychopaths, are you prepared for psychopaths?"

She calmly looked up at Banks, and with a stone face said, "I'm ok with that, I'll match my psychosis to theirs any day."

Banks called Vivian later that evening, "Meet me at the gym tomorrow, one o'clock, your trainers will pick you up. Are you prepared to move underground and go totally dark for a couple months?"

Vivian gave him a single nod, "Yeah, I'm ready."

"Ok, meet me at the gym at six and bring two hundred thousand dollars. They've agreed to take you, but remember, if you go through that door, you do it alone. I can't help you after that."

Her alarm clock woke her at four in the morning. She got up, took a shower, and packed a small bag. She heard glass break in the kitchen down the hall, then she heard Francois cussing, obviously because he had dropped his bottle of wine. Her watch reminded her she had a half hour to get to the Gym. She grabbed her bag and went to the kitchen. Laying the bag on the floor at the

entrance, she stood at the Door. “Francois, I’m leaving, I’m going to training.”

“Fine then, go away,” he angrily shouted, waving his hand away from his face.

Vivian stared him down, “Come say goodbye.”

She watched Francois stumble toward her, and all she could think about was saying goodbye to all her dreams. It lit a fire in her like she’d never known. Her heart began to beat faster the closer he got, and by the time he reached her, she was ready to strike. All her training allowed her to punch him square in the face and knock him out.

She yelled at herself, “Damn it!” Now I got to wake him up.” She took a glass from a cupboard and filled it with cold water from the sink. Splash. “Wake up. Open your eyes,” she insisted.

He slowly opened his eyes and was gagging at the blood he was swallowing. As soon as he came back around, Vivian whispered to him, “I’m leaving, you should treat women better,” she said. Francois lay there moaning as Vivian walked away. A monster came out of her as she hit Francois and she liked it.

Vivian drove up to the gym, got out, and went in carrying her bag over one shoulder. As soon as she entered, a man met her at the door. “Your keys please,” and put out his hand. She obliged, acknowledging she wouldn’t be seeing them anytime soon. Armand stepped up and stood in front of her. “The money?” He asked sporting a huge smile.

She handed him five stacks of hundred-dollar bills, “Are you, my sensei?”

“Little Lady, I have no spiritual purpose, I don’t need titles, I teach technics in killing people. He then changed his voice to a softer more comfortable voice, “My name is Armand, I just facilitate, your instructors will take over from here, they will bring out the lion and the lamb in you, it’s up to you now.”

Vivian said, “Fair enough.”



“Why do you want this training?” Armand asked, he was genuinely curious.

Vivian looked at him with determination, “To never be a victim again.”

“But you’re not here for self-defense, are you? What is your agenda?” he asked while slapping the money into his other hand. “I can see it in your eyes, you’re on a mission.”

“I aim to defend the innocent by being proactive and hunting down and eliminating bad people.”

“Ah, you want to be superhero?”

“No, I’m just a woman looking for a little justice in this world.”

“Ok, whatever, while you are here, be mindful who you are getting in bed with, your fellow students are future assassins, government assets and all-around psychopaths, extremely dangerous liaisons. The only thing I can promise is, that every waking moment for the next six weeks will be hell.”

Vivian acknowledged with a nod of arrogance and confidence.

He led her through the gym and out the back door. She looked out to the street on the right and saw a man driving away in her Fiat as Armand held open the door to a Mercedes Minivan. One of the three men escorting her, placed a dark cloth bag over her head before driving away. We best guess was that they traveled about an hour north of Paris to a small town. Underneath an old Petrol Station was an entrance to a massive maze of tunnels. They were left over bunkers and tunnels from World War II that had been hidden since the war. She was escorted to a section of the Labyrinth where she would be isolated for the duration of her stay. They escorted her down the stairs and through the basement wall, to a damp and cold underground world. Armand removed the bag, “This is your new home for a while, and this is where I say goodbye. Good luck Vee.”

“I can accept the challenge because I refuse to live in fear, and don’t worry about these other spooks and cooks down here, I’ll take it easy on them.”

Armand laughed, “Keep that sense of humor, you’re going to need it.”

Shortly after Armand left, the trio of gentleman addressed her in her room. A Frenchman, an Englishman, and A Spaniard. The trio met in college and secretly formed a tactical-defense training school for covert operations. Each was special forces withing their own perspective military branches and have seen more people quit than pass this course.

“Stand up,” the Englishman said sternly. “We are literally going to beat you up, tear you down, and build you back up,” he spoke in a rough and hoarse voice, trying to instill a little fear.

“I suppose that is what I need,” she confessed.

“You look and sound smart,” the Spaniard told her. “I’ll fill you in on a secret, you came here you, but you’re going to leave someone else.”

“Funny,” she said. “I could say the same for you.”

“We got a feisty one here,” the Frenchman said.

Vivian was expecting intense training, but for forty-five days, the small group of trainees were trapped in an underground world being mentally and physically reconditioned. The three instructors took turns, stood watch, over the eight students and in their own and different ways, temporarily took possession of their will. Vivian struggled the same as the others, but she never showed it.

On the fifth day, the Frenchman came to warn Vivian, “Do you know a Venezuelan Drug Lord by the name of Antonio Fuentes?”

She looked at the Frenchman, “Yes.”

“Apparently, he’s looking for you and has reached out to a wide network to find you. We think one of your classmates may

be here for the bounty, after all, those are the skills we're teaching."

"Who is it?" she plead.

"We don't know, but we want you to ring out so we can catch who follows."

"Why are you helping me?"

"Because Armand likes you, and we admire your heart and want you to succeed."

"Under the circumstances I'd have to say, that was the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.

"Are you ready?" the Spaniard asked Vivian.

"Yeah, let's do this," she said as she walked briskly toward the center of the room and rang a bell hanging at the door to the tunnel out. The trio sat in waiting. Vivian was to walk out of the main corridor and wait at the exit. If there's one of Antonio Fuentes' goons around, he'll ring out as well to pick up the trail. After Vivian walked out of the cavern and into the tunnel out, the Englishman noticed Carmelo was missing. "Carmelo's gone, tell Frenchy."

Carmelo bolted out of the door after Vivian rang out and was much faster than the trio anticipated. "He's about a hundred yards down on the left," the Spaniard shouted as they all ran through the tunnel.

Carmelo made it to the exit just moments before the trio would show. Within the next six seconds she had Carmelo right where she wanted him, at the end of her blade. The Spaniard had given her his razor-sharp, double-sided dagger, and she used it with precision stabbing him four times in two seconds, lung, lung, heart, and throat. The throat was so he could die in fear looking up at her.

It was ten more seconds before the trio caught up. "It looks as though the threat has been eliminated," the Englishman said, and the Frenchman laughed. The Spaniard told her to keep the knife.

Before they went back into the tunnel, Vivian turned around and slashed a V in Carmelo's forehead. She looked at her handywork, then at the blade, then at the Spaniard and smiled. "Thanks."

The Frenchman asked why, "What is with the V?"

Vivian replied, "V is for Vivian, but people will give it its own meaning. It doesn't matter what people think it means, Antonio Fuentes will know."

The trio were impressed and secretly scared, in a strangely erotic way. To a fighter, there's nothing sexier than a dangerous woman.

When she returned to her training, the other students deserved an explanation and were told of the failed attempt against Vivian and her ability to handle herself.

The seven remaining students completed their training and returned to their private worlds. Vivian's first night out of the catacombs was ironically celebrated quietly and alone. She took a train north to Lille then west, to London. She checked into the Hotel La Place, purchased a bottle of bourbon from the lounge, took it to her room, and sat at the table to write a letter.

*"My dearest Sadie, I've missed you terribly and apologize for leaving without saying goodbye. It didn't work out with Francois, all my dreams smashed again and feeling terrible about leaving you. I am making plans to return home and wished you were coming with me."* She took a big sip of bourbon and continued writing, *"My past followed me to Paris, and I fear you may be in danger. I'm in London but will fly out on the 15<sup>th</sup>, even if you don't want to go back to America with me, would you consider spending a little time with me before I go? I hope you will."* She stopped writing and took another sip of bourbon. She stared at the door while daydreaming of a happier time. A tear rolled down her cheek as she continued to write, she wrote through the tear drop, leaving a smudge in her closing, *"I have been selfish in my pursuit of love and failed to see what was in*

*front of me. I'm sorry, can you forgive me? I love you always, Vee.*" She sealed the envelope and went to sleep.

The following morning, she gave the letter to the concierge at the registration desk to put in the post for her then took a taxi downtown to go shopping. Though she wasn't big on shopping, it did calm her nerves and helped her to relax. She was leaving one life for another and that required yet another identity. Vivian was tired of running, tired of lying, she just wanted to get back home and start fresh. Vivian was well off, financial, and didn't have to worry about money, however, worrying about Sadie's safety, more than hers, took up a lot of space in her head.

Sadie received the post on a Monday, and the date on the letter reminded her she had just four days before Vivian left for home. The Hotel La Place stationary was fine cotton paper, elegantly penned, it even smelled of Vivian. After Vivian left her in Paris, Sadie felt perilously alone. Now, out of the blue, Vivian's letter came and filled her aching heart with the love she thought she had lost. Her thoughts were scrambled with excitement, and she sat the letter on the counter, raced back to her room, and packed a bag. She left for London immediately without bothering to tell anyone, she dropped the key card off at the front desk on her way out.

Sadie called Vivian when she arrived at Heathrow. "I'm here in London."

"I'll be right there, don't go anywhere." Vivian hurried to the airport.

Sadie had a hard time composing herself when they finally got close enough to hug. She cried, which made Vivian cry, maybe for the first time in ten years. "I've missed you sweetie," Vivian softly spoke while touching her cheeks.

"I'm so happy you're ok," Sadie said. "When you left, I was lost, and I cried, but the happiness in seeing you again makes up for everything. I missed you too."

Vivian took Sadie's hand and walked through the majestic terminal to a lounge, where celebratory drinks welcomed their reunion. Vivian began the conversation slowly and calmly, but it grew more exciting the deeper she got into her story. "After Francois and I parted ways, I completed an insanely difficult training course in tactical defense. I refuse to ever let someone hurt me again. Sweetie, I'm a dangerous woman. You remember our buddy, Antonio Fuentes? He had one of his goons enrolled in the same underground class I was in. He had found me from the other side of the world in just a few months."

Sadie belted, "Oh my God. What happened?"

She told her, "I plugged him full of holes and sliced a V on his forehead."

Sadie opened her eyes wide, somewhat in shock from the graphic images she imagined and nervously asked, "What will you do, now? He's going to know his guy failed."

"Sweetie, I'm going home. If I'm going to have someone out to get me, I'd prefer it to be in my backyard. If he comes, I'll be ready."

"Oh Vee, you're going to get yourself killed," Sadie insisted.

Vivian took a sip of her drink and looked at Sadie. "You know, some people were just born to change things, I am one of them. I know it sounds dangerous, but I choose to believe it's more dangerous for them." Vivian pulled out her double-edged dagger and showed it to Sadie. "This pearl handled baby was a gift from a friend and mentor. It has saved me more than once and believe me when I say I'm a surgeon with it."

Sadie admitted, "Vee, I'm scared. Scared for you mostly."

"It'll be fine," Vivian reassured her. "I'm going to make it my mission to remove Antonia Fuentes as a threat to either of us."

"Now you're really scaring me," Sadie said.

“I’m sorry,” Vivian humbly said. “I’m not an average person, average people don’t fight crime, they run away from it. I don’t run. Everything is going to be fine with him gone. Maybe instead of waiting for him to find me, I should take a trip to Caracas and finish this. Then, when I return, everything will be perfect.”

That didn’t ease Sadie’s mind, not even a little, but she felt safer with Vivian. Her involvement in The Harem gave her an exciting taste of danger, but it was Vivian’s absolute confidence in herself that set the standard “Vee, you put a lot of faith in me back home, and even though this scares me, I want you to trust me again. I can help, besides, if I’m not part of it, I won’t see it coming.”

Vivian understood she’d been there. “I’m sorry I got you into this, but now that we’re partners again, let’s have some fun with it. Sasha and Tanya went back to New Orleans a month ago, I’m supposed to meet up with them. It’ll almost be like old times.”

Sadie didn’t have the same connection with Sasha and Tanya as Vivian. They lived in a world more chaotic and less secure, but Vivian came from that life herself, so Sadie had a lot of empathy for them. Sadie wanted to believe that she had the strength and conviction to stand up for herself like Vivian and take it to such extremes as death. When she looked at Sasha and Tanya, she could imagine that they could.

For the rest of the day and deep into the night, they enjoyed each other’s company while touring the major sights of London. Looking up to the moon, bright as she’s ever remembered, Sadie said, “Vee, we can’t go up against the cartel, it’d be suicide.”

Vivian reached down and held her hand, “Sweetie, we can, and I will, don’t worry, I’ll keep you safe.”

“How? I don’t understand,” Sadie replied.

“I plan on hanging out with Sasha and Tanya at home. There we’ll be able to see and hear anything coming. I’ll make

plans to take out Antonio and convince the cartel that I'd been killed. Thus, closing the book on the entire fairy tale." Sadie was scared but it didn't prevent her from going along, in fact, that high level of excitement was what drew her close to Vivian in the first place.

"Ok, whatever I can do, count me in."

Vivian smiled and said, "I know sweetie, this will be an exciting chapter for that book you wanted to write. Hey, I am going introduce you to my mom when we get to New Orleans."

"I thought your mom killed herself."

Vivian clarified, "I mean my foster mom. She's a pro at makeup and I'm going to get her to teach us how to make me look like a peasant hag."

"Why would you want to look like a peasant?" Sadie laughed.

"So, I can get close to Antonio unsuspectedly. What a surprise it'll be for him when he realizes who I am. I can't wait to see the look on his face."

Sadie's mind was racing, she was trying to analyze and conceptualize Vivian breaking into a cartel compound, killing the king pin, and escaping. As hard as she tried, she couldn't. Apart from the international intrigue, Sadie was comfortably at ease in Vivian's presence.

They walked hand in hand on their way back to the hotel and talked of each other's exploits while apart in Europe.

Their flight arrived in New York at five in the morning, with a connecting flight to New Orleans. Walking through the airport Sadie had an eerie feeling, "Vee, are you worried someone might know you flew into town?"

"No, sweetie, everyone knew me as Vanessa Wakefield back home and Veronica Caine in Europe. No one knows me by my real name other than a few close and old friends."

Sasha and Tanya were there to meet them at New Orleans International. "Vee, over here," Sasha hollered.



They met at arrival gate with excitement and the emotional reunion genuinely brought them close together. “Candy couldn’t make it?” Vivian asked.

“Girl, she done got married and is traveling the islands,” Sasha said.

“No way! Anyone but Candy.”

“Yeah, he ain’t too good looking, but he got a lot of money.”

“Now that sounds like Candy.”

They laughed as they continued their reuniting embraces.

Vivian led them toward baggage claim as she discussed her need to lie low.

Sasha offered, “We got you covered, baby, Tanya and I invested in our own little house for honeys. We own a motel in Metairie, with a very respectful clientele, quiet, out of the way and we have plenty of room.”

Vivian admitted, “Thank you, I have some bad people looking for me you know.”

“Yeah, girl, I got your letter. Just like old times, we’ll take care business, don’t you worry.” Sasha always had Vivian’s back, she acted as her big sister on the streets with a responsibility to protect her since she was sixteen. Tanya was more like a younger sister trying to fit in, but when they were all together, they acted as one.

Just when Sadie began to feel a little out of place, Vivian took her hand and looked deep into her eyes, and whispered, “We’ll be just fine.”

## Chapter Two

Sasha got Vivian and Sadie a room at her motel, and they sat down the first night reminiscing about their travels. Of course, there was drinking involved, so things got very intimate.

“Girls, I need your advice,” Vivian admitted after making a toast to friendship. “Antonio found me four thousand miles away. I think I need to find him before he finds me again.”

Sasha wasn’t ready for business talk and interrupted, “Vee, sugar, we’re safe here for now. There’s plenty of time to come up with plans, I want to celebrate us tonight, kind of like the old days, remember?”

Vivian replied, “I’m sorry, you’re right. So, what happened to those guys you kidnapped in Hamburg?” She momentarily paused then started laughing. Then Sadie and Tanya joined in.

Devilishly snickering, Sasha explained, “Those boys lost their usefulness after thirty minutes and we kicked their ass to the street, in the rain, half dressed.” Laughter and drinking continued for hours.

Story after story, kept them engaged all evening, and when it was time for Sasha to leave, she asked Vivian, “I’ll come back tomorrow and we can talk about a plan, ok?”

“Yeah, girl, but not before coffee.”

The next day Vivian laid out her entire encounter with Carmelo, from her training underground to the newfound talents in combat. “If I can get close to him, I can take him out, and I think I have a way to do it.”

Sadie brought them a cup of coffee and sat next to Vivian. Addressing Sasha, Sadie said, “Speaking for myself, she scares me with this idea.”

Vivian conceded, “Yes, of course it is dangerous. Just living is dangerous. Every day we wake up we are exposed to situations that can hurt us. I feel much more comfortable, and

secure, being on the offense than defense. It's not a death wish, I assure you, it's who I am. Fight, not flight, will make it right."

"How do you intend to get close to him?" Sasha asked.

"I was hoping you'd talk her out of it," Sadie told Sasha.

Vivian took a sip of coffee, cleared her throat, and interjected, "My mom is a master with makeup. She can make an old Betty Davis look like a young Ginger Rogers. I'm betting she can teach me to look old and haggard. I'm studying Spanish and my plan includes me infiltrating his casa as a maid, get close, put three holes in his chest and walking out totally unsuspecting."

Sasha boldly blurted out, "Girl, that, is so mission impossible, I'm in."

"Damn it, Sasha," Sadie cried, "Ok, so if we do this, we do this as a team. If you're going to put yourself in that much danger, I need to be there for you."

"Me too," Sasha said. "You're not leaving me here. I'll order one of those language programs and we can all study together."

"I want to meet your mother and learn her secret with makeup too. You'll need help to look convincing." Sadie suddenly laughed and snickered at Sasha, "Vee is so damn beautiful, can you imagine her looking like a hag?"

Sasha replied, "No girl, this is going to be an Oscar winning performance."

Suddenly everyone's fears and apprehensions vanished, they felt in control once again. The excitement they shared during Castle Rouge reminded them how strong they were together.

Vivian asked, "Where's Tanya?"

Sasha smiled, "I sent her on a mission, she's out in town setting up an early warning system. If strangers come around, we'll know."

"I don't think it's a good idea for people to know I'm here."

“No girl, they won’t know you’re here, our cover is we owe the cartel money, and they may come to collect, we need a little heads-up, you now?”

“Ok,” Vivian said with a sigh, she’d hate herself if she caused other people to get hurt.

Ms. Baxter adopted Vivian when she was sixteen and after twelve years barely recognized her. She never asked where Vivian got the money to send her every month and enjoyed living vicariously through her to the point of psychosis. She asked Vivian, “Why in the world would you want to look older and uglier?”

“I’m playing the part of a Spanish peasant woman in a Broadway play called the Daughters of El Diablo.”

“Oh honey, that’s fantastic,” and began discussing how age affects her skin texture and tone, totally unaware of the true nature of her service.

Sadie listened carefully to her every word, watched, and analyzed every stroke and movement of her hands. Ms. Baxter asked Sadie, “You’re paying extra close attention, are you interested in this?”

“Yes ma’am,” Sadie said, “I find this amazing, you’re so talented. I’ve got to be able to duplicate these results before every performance.” Ms. Baxter suddenly felt useful again and that reminded her how she helped Vivian out of her shell, she smiled at Sadie, “behold,” she declared as she brushed powder across Vivian’s forehead.

They would need three or four more lessons to be comfortable enough to leave the nest. Vivian, Sadie, Sasha, and Tanya, all studied Spanish for five weeks, every day for four hours. Simple phrases, simple words, for simple people. To cover their accents, they practiced speaking with a horse raspy voice, like that of a heavy smoker. Their hope was to get in and get out without speaking at all but had to be prepared to engage the guards if confronted.

When Sadie was confident that she had learned to apply Vivian's makeup right, Vivian took her character out to the streets to gauge its effectiveness. Tanya had never seen Vivian in disguise so while Sadie talked Tanya into shopping at the grocery store with her, Vivian took the opportunity to test it and confronted her in one of the isles. She purposely backed up and bumped into Tanya trying to turn her cart around. Hunched over her cart, Vivian looked up at Tanya with a sour look of contempt and grunted, then walked away slowing with one leg slightly lagging. Tanya told Sadie, "Some people just have no manners at all."

Sadie didn't say anything but watched Tanya's face closely for signs of recognition. They rounded the isle and started back up the next isle to meet the old woman again. This time Vivian was taking up center of the isle so others couldn't pass. Tanya had it and said, "Hey, what's your problem old lady, why are you so rude to block the isle?"

Vivian mumbled and shuffled her feet as she maneuvered the cart to one side, she spoke in a raspy Spanish accent, "Rude is forgetting who your friends are."

As soon as Tanya heard her voice, the lights came on, and she realized who she was. "Oh my God, you look great, I mean terrible, really terrible. I had no idea!" and began to laugh.

Sadie admitted, "Ok, I'm convinced."

Vivian told her, "I think it's time to start planning that trip down south."

Being confident in themselves was that magic everyone wanted from Vivian. She knew she could hold her own and that gave her the advantage every time. Sadie felt a weak flutter in her arms and legs, like she did when they first met, "Vee?" she asked. "Do you really think all this will go as planned?"

"God, I hope not," Vivian replied. "I want to be able to enjoy this victory. But don't worry, I won't do anything stupid or put you in harm's way."

Sadie laughed, “Just knowing you, puts someone in harm’s way, so, what’s the plan?”

“I want to spend a few days down there, getting people used to seeing me around, like a house servant. My plan is to be as inconspicuous as possible, then pick my time, make my move, and get out of there quietly and quickly. I will be the ghost story they tell their grandchildren. Antonio won’t see it coming. I plan to look in his eyes and tell him, V is for Vivian, then plug him with holes.”

“God, Vee, I get the chills when I hear you talk like that, always have. I think that’s why I’m addicted to you.”

Vivian thought she knew what Sadie was suggesting and asked her, “Do you want to spend a little time together before we meet with the girls?”

“I would love to,” she excitedly replied.

It must have been out of habit, but Vivian’s internal clock woke her at sunrise. She started a pot of coffee, and the smell of chicory woke Sadie. Sasha and Tanya arrived together at ten.

They sat at the table, Sadie with a notepad, and Vivian with a cup of coffee with a shot of Bourbon in front of her, Vivian began by suggesting, “We all fly down together, and we all fly back together, agreed?” Vivian scanned the girls’ faces. Sadie, you’re the manager, can you set us up with a room in an average motel, something low key.”

Vivian recalled, “I have a number for someone that can help. Armand gave it to me as I left Paris. I’ve called him and he is arranging transportation from Mexico City to Caracas and back to Mexico City.”

Sasha looked at Vivian, “So baby, what’s my part going to be?”

“Remember sneaking into Remi’s party and stealing her boyfriend, then you left him tied naked to a tree?”

Sasha laughed loudly. “Yeah, that was good times.”

“We’re going to do something like that again. You and I will dress like hags, look like hags, sound like hags, even smell like hags. We’ll fit right in.”

Vivian turned to Tanya, “Tanya, honey, I need you to also find ground transportation, maybe rent a car or scooters. We’ll have to get back and forth to the compound daily without causing alarm.” They were gathered at the table looking at an aerial photo of the compound. We’ll take the bus from the market to the compound and back.

I’ll take care of communications, while I was in Paris, I met a man, who gave me a number, to someone that would be an asset. I’ve already contacted him; he will meet us there as soon as we have a date.”

Sasha asked, “How can he be trusted?”

Vivian replied, “If you can trust someone to save your life, surely you can trust them to honor their word. That’s what my friend told me as he put his life on the line for me. Antonio would be all over him if he knew what his role in Carmelo’s death was. Yeah, I trust him. Even if we didn’t have communication, we could still pull this off.”

“I for one, think communication is important,” Sadie said, looking at Vivian.

Tanya broke ranks, “I’m sorry, I’m a little slow, Vee, what was that you said back there?”

“What?” Vivian asked.

You said, “V is for Vivian.”

“Oh, yeah. I sliced a V on a man’s forehead, now everyone knows my name. But they think it’s V for Vanessa, the name I was using back in the states.”

Sasha said, “Everyone’s going to be thinking vendetta, or vengeance, or victim. There is already a rumor that the slicer runs free in the city. Started about twelve years ago, remember,” she looked at Vivian.

Vivian smiled, “I remember, that case was never solved,” she snickered. “Tanya honey, no one outside of this room, and Candy, know who Vivian Bouvier is. I have been going by Vanessa Wakefield since I was sixteen. I’ve gone by Vee, ever since.”

Tanya laughed and said, “Maybe I could put a T on their foreheads.”

“Hold it right there,” Vivian put her finger up, “You don’t want to go down that road unless you plan to dedicate your life to it. It will consume you as it has me.”

Sadie was steadily taking notes. Over the course of the next few days, every aspect of the plan would be dedicated to memory, and the more notes she had the better prepared she felt they would be. Vivian sipped her bourbon, licked her lips, and stared at Sadie, “It’ll be fine, Sweetie,” Vivian encouraged her to relax.

Sadie told her, “I know, but I’m in a groove. This is a lot of info to take in and process. I’m keeping notes for the book you said I could write. I want you to be proud of it.”

“I forgot, well, I guess I have to make this shit look good then, don’t I?”

Sasha and Tanya, hearing this for the first time, had something to say. “Don’t forget to change the names to protect the innocent,” Tanya said.

Sasha responded, “Hell, ain’t no body innocent.”

Tanya couldn’t help but agree.

“Back to business, girls,” Vivian asked, “Sadie, can you and Tanya get that chest,” she pointed to a chest against the wall to the right, “and bring it over here?” They carried it over and opened it up, it was filled to the top with old clothes. Vivian’s grandmother’s clothes.

“What is this?” Sadie asked.

“These were my grandmother’s clothes. The only things I have to remember her by. She died when I was young, I hid her



clothes so people wouldn't throw them away, or burn them, they're the only thing I have left to remind me of who I am or where I came from."

Sasha knew it to be much deeper than that. She remembered some of the stories Vivian told her about her grandmother and the curses she put on people who wronged her. She knew Vivian kept those clothes to harness her grandmother's power.

Vivian bent over and pulled out a shawl, she draped it over her shoulders, bent over and asked if anyone wanted a drink, in Spanish, and poured herself one.

Sasha looked at Vivian and said, "Baby, I ain't wearing your maw maw's clothes."

"Oh, course not, I understand, but you got to admit, they won't see it coming."

They flew to Mexico City from New Orleans on American Airlines, took a short taxi to a private airfield north of the city where Frank would fly them into Caracas. They took a taxi to the hotel and scouted the local market, where Vivian and Sasha would shop daily as part of their cover. Taking fresh fruit and bread into the compound daily was routine for family women and the perfect disguise. After two days of roaming around the compound inconspicuously taking notes.

It worked like a charm. When hardly ever spoken to, or questioned, they went about their day scoping out the compounds entrances and exits, how many guards there were and where they hung around. But Vivian's prize would be where Antonio slept. While Vivian and Sasha played 007 in the compound, at time just feet away from their target, Sadie had a live feed to a low-tech earpiece.

They rode the bus from the market out to the compound daily carefully evaluating her escape possibilities upon the completion of her mission. They decided they would have Tanya and Sadie rent scooters and meet them at the entrance of the

compound when they completed the mission. “We will need two reliable scooters, a bus driver to block the road in case of emergency, and of course, our ride home ready to go.”

“Sounds ok to me,” Sasha asked.

“Let’s do this. For the past three afternoons, Antonio’s been taken a siesta, usually with one of his hookers. We sneak in, you drug her, I kill him, it’s three hours before anyone thinks to check in on him. We calmly walk out, get the scooters, have the bus follow us down the road and we haul ass to the airfield. We can ditch the scooters at the airport.”

“Ok, then girl, let’s do this. Just after noon, on day four, Vivian made the call. Everyone jumped into action. The bus driver drove out to the compound to get into position.

Sasha walked across the brick patio and saw the police chief sitting at a table near the pool on her left and then spotted Antonio walking into the house with a girl. She nodded to Vivian, signaling opportunity to strike. Vivian walked straight into one of the guards who asked her where she was going. She looked all around quickly and simply rose to him, then stabbed him in the neck with her blade quickly, then planted an elbow to his jaw, knocking him out before he hit the ground. He dropped to the floor bleeding heavily. She dragged him into an empty room behind him and shut the door. The game was on now. Vivian rushed to meet Sasha at the entrance of Antonio’s boudoir. Aware there was still one of Antonio’s guards out there somewhere. Vivian and Sasha remained alert yet calm. They snuck up his, paused for a moment. Vivian looked into Sasha’s eyes and smiled. One finger, two finger, three they opened the door, rapidly yet extremely stealthy Sasha attacked the girl from the left side of the bed. Vivian literally jumped into bed and on top of Antonio. She put her left hand over Antonio’s mouth and with her blade in her right, commenced to stab him over and over.

All while Vivian is ending Antonio’s life, Sasha injected the girl with horse tranquilizer and was unconscious by the time

Antonio heard her voice echo in his terminal thought, “V is for Vivian.” But, instead of giving him her signature scar, she terminated the vendetta by simply not perpetuating it. The cartel would think Antonio was just a victim of a competing cartel and cause a war between them. With Antonio gone, the threat is gone. After the light left his eyes, Vivian got off him and they walked out casually out into the hall. The timing couldn’t have entertained Vivian more than the other guard coming up the stairs, right where the first guard was hidden. Vivian bolted with knife in hand, she plugged him once in the chest and sliced his neck to the bone. Everything happened so fast, Sasha was in awe and shock. She knew Vivian was a bad ass but seeing her in action was scaring cool.

Vivian drug him into the room with the other guard careful not to leave a blood trail.

They walked out without delay drawing no attention to themselves. They passed through the front gate and began walking toward the road. The bus driver was right on time and turned around to block the road. Tanya and Sadie, having gotten the message job complete, drove up the compound on scooters and picked them up. Sadie’s view of Vivian and Sasha rapidly deploying out of the gate had her heart racing, meanwhile, Vivian seemed perfectly calm.

Away they went, Vivian on the back of Sadie’s scooter and Sasha on the back of Tanya’s. Vivian laughed and told Sasha, “Looks like the young coming to the rescue.”

Frank owned his own Gulfstream G280 and flew private flights for wealthy people, but this was a favor, a professional favor from a dear friend.

After making altitude, Vivian explained her execution of the plan. “I admit it didn’t quite go off without a hitch. I had to put down a couple guards which changed the perspective. None the less, it’s done, it’s a success, and I am so proud of you all.

Everything, everything went right except the two guards. I suppose it was just meant to be,” then she raised her glass.

Sadie was amazed at Vivian’s outlook on things. A tear would form on Vivian’s face when she reflected upon the hardships the girls that she grew up with had to endure yet could chuckle about killing a couple reprobates guarding a drug lord.

Vivian got up and took her glass with her to the cockpit. She sat in the copilot’s seat to talk with Frank.

“Whose plane is this, Frank?”

“Mine, of course,” he smiled. Frank was good looking and rich; he was used to girls swooning over him, but Vivian didn’t fit the mold, she outshined them all.

“You must be doing rather good for yourself, what’d it cost, 20 – 30 mil?” Vivian pried.

“Yeah, something like that.” Frank was curiously intrigued that she would know its value.

“Thanks for the lift,” Vivian said as she took a sip of her drink.

Frank smiled then put on a serious face, “Armand has many good things to say about you.”

Staring down into her glass she said, “Yeah, he saved my live once you know.”

“Mine too.”

Vivian asked him “Do you know why we came down here?”

“Maybe you’re trying to save the rainforest. I don’t really need to know these things; it makes my business more difficult.”

Vivian asked, “What business is that?” She saw an opportunity, people like talking about themselves, she lured him in by letting him brag.

“I’m a contract pilot, I take man rich people to places no one’s supposed to know about at a healthy cost. Knowing is a liability so I try not to get involved.”

Vivian said, “That’s perfectly understandable but I don’t believe you.” She inched a little closer to him and seductively asked, “Don’t you want to know what a beautiful woman dressed as an old lady is hauling ass out of country?”

Frank looked and got trapped by her soul stealing stare, “Actually, yeah, whatever it was it must have been good. I can see pleasure in your eyes.”

“In more ways than one I assure you.” Vivian did not mince words with inhibition, “Maybe I can tell you all about it later, then stepped out of the seat. She leaned over, kissed him softly, and whispered, I’m dangerous, but treat me right and I’m an absolute angel.”

She walked back to her seat and left Frank on the hook. Vivian was all he could think of all the way to Mexico City.

Sasha and Tanya had never flown before but to them this flight was like a limousine ride. Leather, alcohol, the world going by outside the window, but for Sadie it wasn’t quite so comfortable. She laid her head on Vivian shoulder, “Is he nice?”

“Oh, yeah, he’s hot. I’ll share him with you,” Vivian told her seductively.

When Sadie looked at Vivian, she didn’t just look at her, she noticed her. How much mascara she was using, her smell, the waves, and curls in her hair as it bounced off her shoulder. “That sounds like a lot of fun,” she said enthusiastically.

Sadie may have been able to commit to Vivian and not stray, but realized Vivian not being Vivian was wrong. That’s who she is, her desires are what makes her who she is and if that changes, she stops being Vivian. Sadie encouraged Vivian to be wild, to be herself, without much effort, simply by accepting her. She tried hard to keep any jealousy in check.

Tanya asked Vivian, “When you got Antonio, did you carve a V in his head, or the guards?”

“No sugar, I thought about it, but figured it would be better if they never knew anything about me. With Antonio gone,

no one else has a clue who I am, what I look like, or what my real name is. Without the V, we're free. However, I do plan on using that calling card quite a bit in my next gig. Yeah everyone, I have an admission. I've decided to fight the crime in our streets back home and punish the abusers. I don't care about the cons and the black-market crap; the exploitation and safety of our children, especially girls, like us, is my concern."

Sadie has laid with Vivian enough and talked about the lonely pain of abandonment and abuse. She knew this was something Vivian had to do. "I'm not leaving your side," Sadie said. "If you fight crime, I fight crime."

Sasha and Tanya both joined the conversation. Sasha said, "We came all this way, there's no way we're quitting now."

Tanya added in support, "You're right, those girls need us."

It wasn't a far stretch to say, that was the beginning of a legend.

The flight to Mexico City seemed so much faster than the flight down, but the American Airline's flight back to New Orleans seemed to take forever. By the time they landed, Vivian had cleaned all the old makeup off and changed her clothes, she approached Frank boldly, "See that girl there standing by the door?" She pointed to Sadie.

"Yes," Frank replied.

"Well, she's my best friend and sometimes lover, she's convinced that before the night is over, you and I will end up naked." She paused and looked into his eyes, "But I assured her that it wouldn't happen unless she was involved." Vivian had no inhibitions, her confidence comforted her but often intimidated others. Frank wasn't as seductively easy to manipulate as most men, but he didn't have a chance against her desires.

Frank opened his eyes wide and wasted no time to reply, "I guess we all need to get acquainted then, don't we? How about I call you later, I've got to put the plane in a hanger."

Vivian winked at him and turned sharply toward Sadie, she gave her a thumbs up, then turned back to Frank. “I don’t want to alarm you, but you are aware that we’re two healthy girls, with big appetites, you would do well to pace yourself,” she laughed, then touched him on the cheek and walked off the plane.

Frank has had his share of good-looking women, but none had the power of presence like Vivian. Everything, from the color of her fingernails to the smell of her skin, was perfect.

They left Frank on the plane and hadn’t even made it through the airport, before a jerk made lewd comments to Tanya and Sasha, waiting for a taxi. Sasha wanted to let him have it, but Vivian saw Sasha start a scene just for the fun of it and didn’t want trouble so soon to coming home, so she stepped it.

“Mister,” Vivian said, as she put her hand on his chest. “I’m not your mama, but I know your mama didn’t teach you to treat ladies that way.”

The big man laughed. There she was, 130 pounds wet and she was going to stand toe to toe with him, he was amused.

Vivian’s voice changed, “Do you know what is sad?” She boldly stated, “A three-hundred-pound man crying like a little girl.” She leaned in closer, “You owe them girls an apology or I swear by all things holy, I will take out your ACL. Have you ever seen a three-hundred-pound man try to get around with a torn ACL? It’s pathetic.”

Suddenly the man quit smiling and for reasons beyond his comprehension, turned to Sasha and Tanya and said, “Sorry ladies, I meant no disrespect, just admiring your beauty.”

Vivian admitted to Sadie as they walked away, “I am so glad I didn’t have to kick his ass. I hate crowds.”

Sasha didn’t know Vivian and Sadie were kidnapping the pilot for the night, but after Vivian turned down her invitation to go clubbing, she figured it out. “Damn it, girl. You ain’t wasting no time.”

“I’ll call you tomorrow, we’ll go shopping,” Vivian told Sasha as she gave her a hug. “Be good, see you tomorrow and don’t stay out too late.”

Vivian and Sadie went home while Sasha and Tanya painted the town.

As soon as Vivian got home and poured herself a drink, she called her mom to tell her how great everything worked out with her help and training. Ms. Baxter pretended to have no idea what she was talking about, just carried on as normal. Vivian liked that about their relationship, she could unload clues to her mom without giving anything away and her mother would remain clueless and happy go lucky.

No sooner than she hung up with her mother, Frank called.

“Sorry Vee, I got a call to fly a banker to San Francisco. We’ll have to meet up another time.”

“I am so sorry to hear that. Down the road, you’re going to remember how close you came to this, and realize, there’s more important things in life than money. You’re going to feel bad, and that makes me feel bad.”

Vivian wasn’t used to having men get away and wasn’t sure what a grace saving response should be. “Thanks for the ride, be safe?”

“I’ll call you,” Frank said as he hung up the phone.

Vivian told Sadie, “Well then. Do we stay here, just the two of us, or do we go find Sasha and Tanya?”

Sadie would take a night in with Vivian any day of the week, but knowing Vivian’s thirst for life, she suggested a nice dinner before the club as a compromise.



## Chapter Three

Vivian and Sadie walked into the Silver Spoon Diner at eight o'clock. Upon selecting a booth in the back, Vivian mentioned, "Sasha and Tanya won't be hitting the club till about eleven."

Sadie suggested, "Given the time, how about we catch a movie after dinner?"

"Dinner and a movie? In all my days, I've never been on a dinner and a movie date. Yeah, let's go see a movie before we hit the club."

Their evening was quiet, peaceful but mostly emotionally rewarding. The club would change all that. It didn't help that Vivian didn't like crowds and the place was packed. Vivian hated the whole techno-synthesized rave music blaring at over a hundred decibels. But this was Sasha's gig, so she sucked it up. Sadie fell behind a bit, so Vivian took her by the hand.

She told Sadie, "I hate this atmosphere, I don't trust these people." That was Vivian's way of putting her on notice to stay alert.

They met on the balcony looking down over a row of tables. Small, tall tables, for people standing around to put their drinks on, just another way they maximized capacity, obviously well over the limit. No sitting room unless you're invited to the reserved areas. Sasha had to yell to be heard over the music, "There's my girl, she's getting us invited to join a group over there." Everyone turned to see where she was pointing.

They were introduced to Hugh Biggy, a regular investor of the club, which gave him certain privileges. He stared at Vivian with his tongue half out. "Damn girl, you're smoking!" he said loud enough to be heard.

She just smiled and nodded.

Sadie held Vivian hand firmly. They sat down and Hugh sat up. Vivian asked, "How does a girl get a drink around here?"

Hugh realized that was a hint and instructed, “Bobby, get a waitress over here.”

Sasha and Tanya were horsing around with a couple of other girls in the group before returning to Vivian. Sasha joked with Huge, “Don’t go getting too excited, my girl ain’t giving you anything but a hard time tonight.”

While Huge was preparing a slow and witless response, Vivian saw a man at another booth slap a girl. She had no way of knowing what that was all about, all she had was an image in her brain. She shut out the background noise including Hugh’s retort. She looked back to make sure she knew where her friends were as if she was ensuring their safety. Vivian stood and excused herself, “Excuse me darling, I simply must use the lady’s room,” and walked away briskly.

She made her way past a few people, then passed by the couple to get a closer look at him and found an inconspicuous place to stand where she could observe him. She was burning his image into her memory.

She returned to Hugh’s table after about five minutes with no one the wiser. For the rest of the night, she kept track of the guy. Vivian learned a little about herself that night. She had always hated crowds and noise, but now she could see how people can hide within them. She also learned that she would have to keep an eye on her own actions, and not let every little thing trigger her. As much as she wanted to smash a bottle across his face, she knew she had to pick her fights and pick her places.

She admitted to Sadie a little later, after the music took an extremely short break, “I saw a guy slap a girl a little while ago, and I almost went over and slapped the shit out of him. I couldn’t help it; I just wanted to slap the shit out of him. It’s like watching someone kick a puppy, once you see someone kick a puppy, you’ll always associate them with mean and cruel people. That guy has my hand, written all over his face, maybe not today, but one day he’s got payback coming, I can feel it.”

For Sadie to be ok with Vivian's pathological nature was morbidly fascinating. She was able to show empathy or apathy depending on a simple judgement.

They stayed at the club until two a.m. and Vivian decided she just couldn't take it anymore. She gave Sasha and Tanya a hug, "Girl, I got to go, this noise is killing me."

All the way home, Vivian envisioned the guy's face. She watched him slap that girl in the face three or four more times before she finally let it go. Squeezing Sadie's hand, she said, "I almost feel out of control, maybe I need another drink, or maybe I need to train. When I have an outlet, I feel more in control."

Sadie tried to comfort her concerns by downplaying her presumptions. "It's ok, I think it's normal to dislike people like that. I'd like to slap that guy in the face too."

"Yeah, we all say it, but I really want to do it and know that I can," Vivian said. "Unfortunately, my actions can get other's hurt, which is harder to live with."

Sadie began to see a little deeper into Vivian's psyche and realized the story she was writing would end up being a manifesto rather than a memoir.

They left the club shortly thereafter, and low and behold, Vivian couldn't believe her eyes. Just as they stepped out of the club, she saw the girl slapper at the edge of the street, trying to hail a cab.

"There is a god and he's vengeful. Look who it is." Vivian told Sadie as she pointed to the man. There he was standing with the two young girls from the club, Vivian said to Sadie, "I'll bet those girls are underage." She turned to Sadie and insisted, "Don't get too close."

Sadie questioned, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to influence him to be a better person. Watch and learn." Vivian stepped out quickly. She approached him awkwardly and dropped her pocketbook. He did as she thought he might and bent over to pick it up for her. When he did, she

didn't hesitate to raise her knee right into his chin. His head snapped sharply to the right, and he was out cold before his face hit the pavement. The two girls with him jumped back and eagerly enjoyed the action.

Vivian and Sadie propped him up on the side of the building. People came and went and oddly walked by with little concern. Vivian slapped him a little to bring him back to the consciousness. She questioned him with authority, "Who are these girls to you?"

"Who the fuck are you?" He replied.

Quicker than he could finish talking, she threw her elbow into his face, breaking both of his front teeth.

He spit out blood as he tried to ask why.

"You better not get any of that on me buddy, or I'll make it bad, really bad." Vivian said with the power of truth.

"They're my girls, they work for me." He nervously replied.

"What's your name?" Vivian asked.

"Karl."

"Well Karl, I am a dark angel in your world now, I will find you and grant your wish to be famous like George here," she showed him a photo of dead George with a V on his forehead. "I will come back and talk with these girls again, and if you have treated them badly, I will turn you into a postcard." The man pissed himself. As she left, she told the girls, "Get away from him, he will only cause you misery and pain." If you need a place to stay, we can help." She then flipped Karl over, reached under her shirt and pulled her knife out of the garter and slashed his backside. Her two strokes were from out to in, top to bottom, on each cheek. She left her mark without having to compromise the value of the V on a forehead. During these couple minutes on the street in public, a total of six spectators witnessed her actions. No one had any problem with her actions. Society seemed to be in decline, and eliminating threats seemed to be a good thing.

Vivian stood, addressed the bystanders, “Nothing to see here, just a dirty, sex trafficking, slave runner getting what’s coming to him.” The small crowd was in awe of her command over the situation. By her classifying him as a sexual and child predator, he wouldn’t get an ounce of compassion from the crowd. Vivian walked away with the complete support of the witnesses.

After leaving the club and kicking Karl’s ass, Vivian and Sadie took a cab home and talked all the way home. Vivian told Sadie she was thinking about buying a house. “I want it big enough that we could board a few girls in need. I can set up a nonprofit and give some girls a chance in life, give them some direction.”

Sadie recalled, “You had told that guy you were a dark angel, seriously? A V on his ass? She burst into laughter.

“He’s going to look cute in the shower with a big V in his ass,” then Vivian burst into laughter.

Sadie questioned her own motives for going along with everything Vivian is doing, ‘Am I in love? Is this a good idea? Am I going along simply because it’s Vee?’ Sometimes the answer was different when she looked into Vivian’s eyes, so she simply laid her head on Vivian’s shoulder, sighed, then wrapped her arms around her.

A few days later, Vivian had magazines opened all over the table. Sadie looked down at the table, “Those are really expensive homes.”

“I thought you would have realized by now that I don’t waste a lot of money. Hell, I only spent two hundred fifty thousand dollars the whole time I was in Europe and that included two hundred thousand for training. I still have got all kinds of money. Which reminds me, you keep wanting me to get you closer and closer to the action but I’m uncomfortable with that. If you had went through the training that I had, or had some mixed

martial arts lesson, I'd feel a little better about you being so close to danger.”

Sadie thought about it and excitedly replied, “You’re right, I should get some training.”

Vivian asserted, “I don’t think you need the kind of training Armand can provide, local MMA training sounds interesting, we can do it together.”

‘Finally, we’re going to do something together,’ Sadie thought to herself. She wasn’t prepared for the discipline required to train in martial arts.

Frank was unhappy with the clients his dispatcher had been getting for him and decided to terminate him and deal directly with a handful of his regular, more prestigious customers. He managed to make as much room as he could in his schedule to share as much of his time with Vivian as he could. The loss of their first date haunted him and she played it for all it was worth. He even went to the gym with them.

Jasmine was Sasha’s half-sister from Jamaica. She received an athletic scholarship to LSU for track but one of her many passions was MMA. Jasmine was ten years Sasha’s junior, recently moved to New Orleans, and has already been involved in two street fights. They were introduced at the gym where Vivian and Sadie had been training. Vivian told Sadie, “I see a little of me in her, the part that wants to fight.”

One difference between them was, Jasmine hadn’t been sexually abused as a child, though she did have five brothers that bullied her incessantly.

When Frank would go, he’d usually hit the weights and watch Vivian as she worked out on the mat. It didn’t take Frank long to notice how many guys at the gym were watching her too. Frank suddenly had a new perspective of why Vivian was so strong and courageous. It was also an awareness check; he might have to jump in to protect her, but it was more probable, that she would have to save him.

Vivian asked Sadie, “Will you spend a little time with Jasmine and let me know your thoughts about bringing her into the team. Sasha trusts her, so I trust her, but it’s equally as important for you to trust her.”

“Absolutely, do we need another person?” Sadie inquired.

“Yes, we do. The more the merrier, it’s a movement. Besides, she’s family.”

“Silly me. Of course, we’ll get close, I’ll tell you what I think after class.”

Sadie looked up in the mirrored wall and saw Frank doing sit-ups, and every time he raised, he was looking at them.

Sadie softly said to Vivian, “We have company,” and pointed over her shoulder with her eyes. Vivian looked up and saw Frank watching.

Vivian laughed, “He’s playing guard dog. He’s harmless. Besides, you never know when an extra pair of hands will come in use.”

“Vee, I just lost you to François, I’m not going to lose you to Frank, am I?” Sadie bluntly asked.

She laughed, “No sweetie, just having fun. We’re still going to climb that mountain together. In the meantime, I want you and Jasmine to get close. I trust your opinion and you can never have too much help.”

Sadie replied, “I’m just making sure you’re safe in my own way.”

“Sasha tells me, Jasmine knows the District Attorney. The same District Attorney who had lost her husband and daughter. I’d like you to get close to Jasmine and see if she can get me an appointment with the DA, one on one.”

“Oh, this is another op?” Sadie asked excitedly, then felt her embarrassment for feeling jealous.

Vivian had been keeping a close visual on the cab driver. The music blaring through his earphones was so loud Vivian could hear it from the back seat, so she was confident that she

could talk casual without him hearing, “Sweetie, when we get home, I’m going to run something past you, but it requires us to go back into the belly of the beast.”

“Can’t you just ask me now?”

“No, sweetie, we need to be alone.”

Sitting alone, after they got home, Vivian told Sadie of her plan to get the District Attorney on her side.

“I heard on the news that the DA’s family was killed in a home invasion. Two boys from the youth detention center escaped, followed the DA’s daughter home, and raped and killed her. Her dad heard the screams, ran toward his daughter’s bedroom door, where they shot him and left him for dead while they abused his daughter. The judge in the case declared it a mistrial, because the police leaked the juvenile’s identification to the press and of course they polluted the jury pool.”

“Oh my god, that’s terrible.” Sadie exclaimed.

“I know this woman. She lived her entire life, respecting and living up to the law. Now, the law had failed her, for her, life must have justice, even if it’s not pretty. Get Jasmine to set me up with Ms. Whitman. I think I can get her to work for us. If she’s bitter toward the system, she just might need what I can do for her.”

It took a week, but Jasmine managed to get Ms. Whitman to agree to meet with Vivian. Being a close friend to MS. Whitman’s daughter helped her case. They met at her home in her upscaled community.

A staff member let them in and through the house to the library where Ms. Whitman was sitting behind a desk. She graciously stood up and introduced herself. She was much more reserved and lonelier in her new life, and the medication for anxiety, depression, and trauma didn’t help.

She stepped forward and gave Jasmine a brief hug.

“It’s good to see you Jaz.” The DA’s daughter was a school friend of Jasmine and Ms. Whitman wanted to learn more



about her daughter straight from her friends, the people her daughter knew the best.”

Ms. Whitman escorted Vivian and Jasmine to a sitting area.

Vivian started, “Ms. Whitman, I’d like to share my deepest condolences for your loss.”

She heard that a lot lately and just nodded her head, in repose.

“For a person of the law, to have the law fail you must be hard.” Vivian spoke compassionately.

The DA became curious, “Where are you going with this?”

“Face it. The system screwed you and your family’s killer goes free. I think I can help. I believe I can restore your faith in Justice.”

“Go ahead, I’m listening.”

Vivian turned and asked, “Jasmine, honey, can I have a word in private with Ms. Whitman?”

Ms. Whitman thought that odd. “It must be important if you have to protect her for knowing?”

“Yeah. You’ve heard of a couple recent cases of a suspected serial killer, haven’t you? They are calling him the slasher or vigilante, because he leaves them with a V slashed into their forehead.”

“Yes, I have.”

“How’s that case coming?” Vivian asked.

The DA was now at the edge of her seat.

Vivian continued, “I know things about those cases, and wonder, if you had the opportunity to make things right, would you?”

“What are you trying to say?”

This is the point of confrontation and decision.

Vivian said, “I’ve seen the pain of loss, predators are dangerous, and our society has made that ok. Has it really made

it ok to accept it? I don't think so. I know how to arrange for your rapist murderer to meet the vigilante and let the chips fall where they will. You can publicly denounce the vigilante as a criminal, and sleep at night because some evil souls are no longer infecting society. It's a win, win, for you."

Ms. Whitman was a smart woman, a quick thinker, even with the effects of her medication, she didn't have to think about it long. "Are you saying you know this slasher or how to find him, and how to get him to handle these two?"

Upon Ms. Whitman's response, Vivian knew she was interested, "Now, that we're actually discussing this, you must have some pretty good whiskey around here."

Ms. Whitman has always been a by the letter legal advocate, but nothing was more righteous than justice for her daughter and husband. She picked up a house phone and asked someone to bring the key to the liquor cabinet.

"I can see you are into criminal activity," the DA said. "Is that why you kept Jasmine out of this conversation?"

"Yes and no, she doesn't need to know all the details, and neither do you. Just know, that the slasher is a protector, a lover of freedom and equality. Only bad, very bad people, receive her wrath."

"Her, you said, her. Not him. What do you know?"

"I know she's an angel, a dark angel sent to protect the weak, especially the girls. Word on the street is that the angel watches over girls on the street and violent crimes against them have dropped in the past few days. If this dark angel were to pay a visit to your family's killers, wouldn't that be poetic justice? You continue to be a good DA and publicly condemn the slasher, but privately help us rid the city of the worst of the worst that slipped through the cracks."

It was Ms. Whitman's turn to take a big swig of her drink. She had a strong feeling that Vivian was referring to herself in third person but chose not to be confrontational. Deep down she

wanted justice for her family, and she knew what was being asked of her. To legally look away, a violation of principles, for justice for her family.

Vivian looked her in the eyes and could see her disappointment in the system, her love for her family, and the hate for the evil men do.

Ms. Whitman conceded. "I'll tell you what, if these two fellas are found dead in an alley, I'd be ok with that. We could chalk it up to the vigilante and investigate no further."

"That's all I needed. You will soon be able to get on with your life knowing justice was served."

Vivian left the DA's house with Jasmine, confident that her actions on the streets had a friend on the inside. Someone able to make any evidence disappear, procedures to be broken, and important information about various people. That was the most important benefit.

Jasmine asked Vivian what they had talked about. "How did your talk go?"

"It was wonderful," Vivian replied.

"The secrecy makes me feel it was about me. Was it?"

Vivian shook her head slightly, "No Jasmine, or do you prefer Jaz?"

"Debbie called me Jaz; I miss her."

"Well, Jaz, it was about my work in the field."

"You told the DA you were a crime fighter?"

"Kind of, I told her I know who the slasher is."

"You turned in the slasher?" Jasmine was all confused now. Sasha corrected her and told Jasmine, "No girl, Vivian is the slasher. She just got the DA to indiscreetly authorized Vivian to go to work in her back yard."

"Relax, I know people. She's a woman with a lot of power. Her self-righteousness will not allow her to be wrong. If those bastards get away with killing her family, she will go

insane. I gave her an out. They don't get away with it and she doesn't have to be involved."

Jasmine said, "I don't know if that's brilliant or crazy. So, what's next?"

"Next, we'll get an itinerary of their other court cases to see when they're expected to walk out of the detention center."

"They escaped in the first place, that alone should keep them in there."

Vivian took a second, "Jaz, don't you get it. A dirty judge has more power than the entire police force. When he ruled that their fourth amendment rights were violated by not getting a search warrant for their DNA, he declared the police had no right or reason to arrest him in the first place, as long as they don't confess, all that evidence is gone. It's just a matter of administrative procedure before they're released, we need to keep track of them. Can you get together with Sasha and Tanya? Let them know what we're doing and ask them to get some eyes and ears on them. Then we wait for our opening."

Suddenly Jasmine understood Vivian's nature and the legendary figure Sasha described.

They returned to the house where Sasha, Sadie, and Tanya were patiently waiting. "Tell me something baby," Sasha asked eagerly.

Vivian smiled like a shark, "She's one of us, she just can't claim it. We're in business girls."

The celebration began with a twelve-year-old bottle of Elijah Craig and a few dance moves.

Jasmine witnessed Sadie and Vivian's interactions and realized some boundaries right away. The setting sun shone through Vivian's hair from the angle Jasmine was facing, and the deep auburn influence of her hair seemed to glow. Later in the evening Jasmine approached Vivian in the kitchen alone.

"I see the power in you."

Vivian replied, "Yes, is that good?"

“Are you sure you don’t want the V to stand for Voodoo? That’s the kind of fear that needs to be associated with our endeavors. It’s either that or you’re going to have to be an angel.”

“Hell, they can call me either, my mission doesn’t change. In the end, as they are looking into my eyes, they will know, V is for Vivian. Nobody else’s interpretation counts.”

A chill went up Jasmine’s spine. “Alright then, I’ll spread voodoo rumors, Sadie can spread angel rumors and before you know it, everyone will pick a side.”

While Vivian and Sadie were enjoying a fruit bowl breakfast together, a report from Sasha came in, “The two creeps hold themselves up in a warehouse near the docks, they were spotted carrying beer into it.”

Vivian said, “Great, ok, now we know where this will go down. Is this a warehouse full of homeless people? Is this a crack house? We need to know more.”

Sasha replied, “Reprobate homeless shelter, about five people total.”

“I’m thinking of leaving a case of whiskey in the trunk of a car parked right outside the warehouse walls. They’ll have the car broken into within 20-30 minutes, find the booze and by midnight will be skunked.”

Sadie laughed, “That’s genius.” Already a little too celebrated, Sadie’s speech was getting slurred.”

Vivian interrupted, “When anyone sees Frank, tell him to come see me. I want some new toys. Night vision goggles.”

“Ooh,” Sadie’s eyes got big.

Vivian looked at Sadie and told her, “I’m going in alone. Stealth and speed, in and out.”

“You can’t keep shutting me out, I need to be a part of you, or I cannot exist in this world, and I really don’t want to become an accountant. Please bring me in, let me be a part of something bigger.”

Resigned to compassion and pride, Vivian acknowledged, “How could I possibly deny you that. Ok, I’ll consider a different plan.”

Sadie stared at Vivian’s face and smiled, “I love your plan, I just want to go with you.” Her speech was still slurred, and Vivian remembered when she first met Sadie, “Sweetie, maybe I should tuck you in,” and she pulled her close to her.

Vivian walked away with Sadie in tow and told Sasha to carry on without them.

She laid Sadie down on her bed and climbed next to her. Vivian brushed her hair with her hand and tried to relax her. “Do you remember when we met?”

Sadie looked up at her, “Yeah,” she snickered.

“I have always been honest with you. From day one, I opened up to you, bore my heart out, and I’m still open. I want to be happy and satisfied in life, but I am afraid for you, I feel a responsibility to protect you. Just like all these girls out there that need our help, I’m just trying to protect you.”

“I know,” Sadie touched Vivian’s cheek, “I love you too.”

Vivian tucked her in and told her, “Dream about it, it will be fun.”

Sadie would dream about it but not in a good way.

## Chapter Four

Tanya knew a boy who was an aspiring car thief and paid him five hundred bucks to steal a car and abandon it at the warehouse. A hundred bucks worth of whiskey in the trunk and the exercise began. At Five-forty-five in the evening with the sun falling over the smokey city, Miguel drove up, and smartly walked away from the bait car. He got picked up by another vehicle at the next block and drove away. Vivian and Sadie watched, from their car, across the street. “Now we sit and wait.”

It wasn't more than ten minutes before a vagrant came snooping around and as one snoops, the others want to snoop. The whiskey was found in less than five minutes and the car pulverized with ten. The noise level inside the warehouse rose and rose throughout the early evening. Around ten p.m., Vivian and Sadie approached the warehouse on the west side between the moonlight shadows. Standing in the dark on the side of the building in their black spandex and ponytails, they could hear the guys on the other side of the wall.

Vivian mentioned, “Close your eyes and picture a face, any face to the different voices, then you can imagine where each of them may be standing. As soon as you have a good idea in your own mind who is who and where they are, we'll go, night vision on and go right past the fools to get to our target. I'll take the target, and we'll fly right past the drunken bastards on the way out.”

“What if they see us?” Sadie asked.

“They are supposed to see us but not recognize us. We're ghosts, they're drunk. You see, their drunken asses are going to have three different nightmare stories to tell the police and the press and none of it will match. It's going to make for some wonderful media attention.”

Sadie closed her eyes and tried to imagine a face to a voice and the location of each voice. After a minute or so, she got it,

One over there, two over there and the other two over here. “I got it Vee, I’m ready.”

“Goggles on, block the streetlight, let’s go,” and she tapped her on the shoulder. She opened the heavy metal door and slid inside quietly and quickly. Sadie followed, with her racing heart, Vivian was calm and methodical.

Their entrance into the warehouse was dark but the closer they came to their targets, the brighter it got. A fire in 55-gallon trash can negated the need for the night vision goggles. Vivian dashed within feet of one fellow, quietly sprinted passed him, from shadow to shadow. If the man saw her, he’d have only seen a ghostly silhouette. Sadie tried harder not to be noticed. The two she was looking for were young, the other vandals in the warehouse were older and much more suspicious. Vivian spotted her targets trying to take a bottle of booze away from one of the older guys.

Vivian picked her moment before Sadie was ready and struck the taller one in the back twice, one in each lung. He fell forward into his buddy who looked up just in time to receive Vivian’s blade to his throat. With a firm grip on his Glock, he got one round off which narrowly missed Vivian. The bullet whizzed past Vivian, she barely flinched, then opened his neck with a second swipe. The poor bastard that the kid clocked for whiskey couldn’t remember anything. The two would be found and another mystery would keep the locals busy and out of their way.

“Come on girl we got to go,” Vivian called back to Sadie. No response, she scanned the warehouse and saw Sadie sprawled out on the floor. “Oh my god, she cried out quietly, and ran to Sadie. The punk’s bullet missed Vivian but hit Sadie in the head. Sadie was unresponsive. Vivian carried her out to the car, in a fireman’s carry, with the deepest of pains in her heart. She laid her in the back seat knowing she was gone and screamed out in her mind with anger. Tears poured as she drove away heartbroken and angry. Angry at herself. Everything in her, told her not to let



Sadie get too involved, yet she did it anyway. She drove and cried for hours. The story was already being reported on the news by the time Vivian stopped for gas. She didn't know where she was going, or where she was. She was just driving away.

Vivian called Sasha, "Girl, the guy got a lucky shot off and got Sadie," Vivian began to cry again. "She's gone."

"Where are you?"

"I don't know, I just got in the car and left. Somewhere in Texas, I'm sure. I'm coming home. Can you get a funeral home to take care of Sadie quietly?"

Sasha assured her she would.

No one knew more, how much pain Vivian was going through than Sasha. They grew up together and Sasha knew of all Vivian's hardships. She warned all the other girls, "We're going to have to take care of Vee when she comes home."

Jasmine played up to Vivian's strengths in her attempt to minimize other people's pain. "She's the strongest person I know, but I know this has got to hurt."

Sasha said, "You have no idea. Vivian loved Sadie, she would have done anything for her, anything. Now she's alone again. I don't know a soul that has lost more than her. She's your best friend, your angel, your protector, and she's lethal. We don't want to see her angry. I'm just saying, be supportive, and don't encourage her while she mourns."

Vivian returned and delivered Sadie's body to a funeral home that Sasha arranged. The owner's son was a medical examiner, she got a death certificate, ceremony, and cremated all without knowledge or fanfare from police or press. It was a well-kept secret. Vivian stayed in New Orleans just two days after she received Sadie's remains.

Vivian told Sasha, "I'm taking Sadie to the west coast and spread her ashes in the Pacific Ocean, Sadie would have liked it. I don't want to say goodbye to anyone. Will you say goodbye for

me? I need a vacation; I need to get away. Please use the house to care for girls in need until I come back.”

Something about how she spoke told Sasha she didn't plan on coming back and was very worried and concerned for her. “You are coming back, aren't you?”

“Of course. I just need time to say goodbye to Sadie in my own way. A couple months on the west coast will do me good.”

Vivian tried to downplay her sorrow, but Sasha knew her too well.

Vivian talked Frank into flying her to San Francisco, she left New Orleans the following morning, but not before dropping off Sadie's personal effects at her mom's house. She boxed up Sadie's journals and binders, things she collected and stories she wrote. All the things needed to memorialize her in literature. Ms. Baxter would now be the unsuspecting caretaker of “V is for Vivian, a biography.”

Vivian had thoughts of this being her last sunrise for a while. Until there was peace in her soul for Sadie, Vivian knew there was no dreaming for a better tomorrow. All she could do now was to learn to enjoy the day you have. For the next couple of months, it will be sunsets that give her the desire for yet another morning.

She arrived late afternoon and immediately took a cab down to Half Moon Bay. The cabbie dropped her off at the Ritz-Carton. She paid him, he drove off, and she walked in and paid for a room. Vivian raided the mini bar and sat with Sadie's ashes. She wrote a note on the hotel stationary, “Dearest Sadie, forever my Sweetie. I Love You.” She folded the note and placed it in the urn with her ashes. She gathered herself by trying to pretend that Sadie's ghost was with her helping her say goodbye.

She walked out of the hotel hoping that the wind was coming out of the east. She walked to the bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean and looked down at the rocks at the water's edge. It reminded her of a movie and could visualize herself falling to

her death in sadness, yet at the same time, looked out to the setting sun, and the orange glow off the water warmed her face and gave her a sense of peace. This is what Sadie was looking for. The breeze usually came off the water but occasionally an odd breeze blowing back out to sea gave Vivian a chance to make saying goodbye spiritually satisfying. Vivian opened the top of Sadie's urn and tilted it upside down, emptying the contents and note to the water below. Sadie's ashes blew out over the cliff and out into the ocean, Sadie was official part of the earth once more. Vivian stood silent as she stared out over the water and said a prayer on Sadie's behalf. "Forgive us our sins, show me the way. Give my sweet Sadie wings." Vivian was by no means religious, but she valued the power of belief.

She walked away from the cliff leaving the urn on the ground near the edge with another note, 'An angel once occupied this urn.'

This would mark a new beginning for Vivian, at least she thought it would. She didn't need anybody, didn't want to get close to anybody, she felt she had a penitence to pay, and loneliness was all she deserved. The guilt and sense of failure weighed heavy on her. She went back to her room and took a long shower before resting her emotionally drained body. She laid in bed for four hours and determined that she'd had plenty of rest, got up, got dressed, and left the hotel.

That evening, nightclub after nightclub, stranger after stranger, she flirted with danger, begging for an opportunity to get all the disappointment and frustration off her shoulders. Without friends around, she didn't have to be so careful. She was eager for an outlet and almost determined to make one. But, around midnight she found herself at O'Sullivan's on the Bay, not too far from Fisherman's Warf. Stepping into the crowded bar didn't bother her anymore. Without having someone to protect, she didn't need to be so defensive. With a statement from each step, she navigated to the bar. She saw an empty seat and sat down

facing away from the bar. It took less than a minute before someone hit on her. A young fellow looked like he might have been in the Navy, stood in front of her. Before he had a chance to say anything Vivian said, “Bourbon, neat.” She looked at him, sizing him up and down.

He wasn’t a very smart man, but even he understood that to mean he needed to order her a drink. He ordered a bourbon and a beer from a nearby waitress then introduced himself, “My name’s Phil,” she stopped him.

“Phil, I don’t want to be a bummer, but someone close to me recently died and I’m trying to get over it so please, no talking, just keep looking pretty.” She gave him fair warning, she could have just as easily said, “I’m a fucking crazy bitch, do you want to have a good time?”

He was young and didn’t understand much about the single’s scene. “How am I supposed to get to know you if we don’t talk?”

She laughed and smiled at him, “Seriously? I hope you find someone to talk to.” She got up and walked away.

The young man had a few drinks and because he still didn’t get it, he said, “but I bought you a drink.”

Vivian turned back around, “Where I come from, men buy the ladies drinks. You are a man, and I am a lady, right?”

He said, “Yeah.”

“But, no talking means, no talking, we could have been lying naked in an expensive hotel, not talking. You broke the rules. Try again later, I usually drink about three of these an hour.” He nodded his head and turned away. He was with a buddy who was laughing at him from the sidelines.

Frank called her while she was there. Though the music was very loud, she managed to understand that he was leaving San Francisco for San Diego in an hour and asked if she wanted to go.

“No darling, that’s ok, I’m going to stay here for a few days. I’ll call you later, bye.”

The music was loud, but it didn’t seem to bother her as much as it had in the past. She stepped toward the opposite side of the bar, deep in the back, to the beat of the music. From behind, no one could resist watching her hips slide left and right in rhythm with their attention.

Vivian spotted a man looking out of place, sitting alone in the middle of a crowd. Vincent sat on a stool staring out of the second story window to the street below. She stopped next to him, waited for him to notice her, and asked him, “Somewhere else, are we?”

He turned to see Vivian speaking. “Pardon?” he inquired, then broke out of his little trance. “Hi, no, I was just reflecting on this day, ten years ago, in this very bar.”

“You either have a good memory or it must have been significant.” She replied.

Vincent stood up and extended his hand, “Vincent.”

She took his hand, noticed the texture, strength, and warmth, while they touched. “Vivian,” she returned introductions. She looked down at the drink in his hand then back up to his eyes staring at her. She raised one eyebrow slightly and within a flash he asked her, “Would you like a drink?”

“Anything Bourbon, if you please,” and smiled at him big. “So, what was it, a birthday or anniversary?” Vivian politely asked.

“No, ten years at this very window, was the last time I saw my wife.”

Vivian got a darker image, “Oh my!” she exclaimed.

“Nothing bad happened. We were discussing a move to San Diego, I was in the military, and she didn’t want to go, so after 15 years of marriage she walks and leaves me right here in this bar.”

“That is so terrible,” Vivian was truly touched.

“Not really, I could never trust her anyway. Funny what you can learn from good neighbors.”

The waitress brought their drinks. Vivian asked him, “So, you came all the way here to reminisce you ex leaving you?”

He laughed, “No, fact is, I am waiting for someone, my daughter. It’s just a coincidence that we’re meeting here.”

There was something different about Vincent that she couldn’t put her finger on. He asked Vivian, “What brings you around and why are you alone?”

“I’m alone because I don’t need anyone.” She nearly took offense to an insinuation that she needed to be taken care of.

“Oh Vivian, everybody needs someone. For me, it’s my daughter, the only good thing I take from my past.”

“I’m sorry, darling, I’ve heard so much BS in my days, I sometimes forget there are honest people left.”

He didn’t take offense and replied, “It’s ok, so, what brings you here?”

“I’m on vacation, I came to say goodbye to my best friend.”

That peeked Vincent’s interests but before he could form a sentence in response, his daughter arrived. “Ah, here she is,” he told Vivian as he looked past her to the left.

A girl approached with a happy look upon her face as she embraced her dad. “Becky, this is Vivian, we just met.” He then introduced his daughter, “Vivian, my daughter, Becky.”

Vivian lit up a bit looking at Becky, so eerily similar to Sadie. Vivian finished her drink and addressed her departure, “It was a pleasure meeting you both, I must take my leave.” She looked at Vincent and wished him, “Happy Anniversary.”

Becky gave her dad a confused look because she didn’t understand.

He replied, “Inside joke.”

The evening didn’t turn out at all what she’d hoped for. She wanted to loosen up, maybe meet someone, or get in a fight.

What she got was normal for someone who just lost their best friend, but it was actions dealing with such sorrow that cast shadows on her life.

She left the bar unsatisfied and returned to her room at the Ritz. She needed to get all the negative about her current situation and knew she couldn't do that without crying deeply in her pillow. She laid in bed curled up clutching a picture of Sadie. She remembered all the exciting and happy times they shared. After all the tears she thought she could endure, a moment came when direction seemed clear.

'Sadie died just the way she wanted. She was determined to fight this fight with me because she believed in me and what I was doing. I'll be damned if I'm going to give up on her, what she believed in, I'm going to honor her every day by making a difference in someone's life.'

After that realization, Vivian peacefully faded off to sleep. She slept for only four hours but woke up energized for a new day.

Vivian stood on the balcony, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and reflected that the sunsets there were beautiful, she preferred a beautiful sunrise, it was time to go home. She came to lay Sadie to rest and managed to do that and more. The pain had been replaced with pride; the loss had been replaced with a new challenge. Her life had meaning once more. Just after breakfast she called Frank and left a message, "Frank, next time you're in San Fran, I could use a ride home, I'm at the Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, room 514."

Frank received the call and was like a knight in shining armor there to pick her up.

"Thanks for coming to my rescue," she paused, "again."

"Anytime, Vee, however, I may need gas money."

Vivian laughed, "I'm sorry Frank, I've been taking you for granted, I have plenty of money, I'll write you a check."

Frank felt a little bad that his finances had withered, but he had taken a fair amount of time away from business now that he makes his own schedule, not including the out-of-pocket money for fuel from previous trips. “I’m sorry, Vee, it takes a lot to maintain this plane.”

Vivian wrote Frank a check for a hundred thousand dollars and handed it to him, “You should have said something sooner, next time, don’t wait to long.”

Frank became overwhelmed with relief, “I wasn’t sure we could make it home on the fuel I have and truly didn’t have enough in the bank to fill it up, I had no choice. If I could, I’d do it all for nothing.”

“I know,” she said and tapped his face.

On the flight back, Vivian slid into the copilot’s seat. “Can we talk?” she asked with excited curiosity.

“Absolutely,” was his reply.

“As you know, my baby died. She was my best friend and often lover, she was the light of my life.”

“I know, Vee, it’s absolutely terrible, I’m here for you.”

“I know you are, and I may need you more now. I’m going home, I’m going to clean up my streets, and I want the life back I’ve never had. I want to see the sun rise over the river again and believe that tomorrow will be better than today.”

Frank understood how the pains and disappointments in her life could lead to such strong and powerful commitments. “You are an amazing woman, Vee. You’re strong and smart, you’re talented and extremely beautiful, and you can dispatch justice like no one I’ve ever met. You scare me, yet I’m addicted to you, I don’t know if I could stab somebody outside of self-defense but admire you greatly for having that ability. I will help you anyway I can, I won’t judge you.”

Vivian laughed again, but this laugh wasn’t for humor’s sake, she tried hiding the seriousness of her proposals. “Darling, all the law enforcement agencies will be collecting and saving



information from everywhere about me and it is only a matter of time before they triangulate. I do not want you or anybody else close to me incriminated. I need your help keeping you out of situations. Sadie demanded I include her, and it killed her. I'm having a hard enough time dealing with that, I can't afford to have to deal with another loss, or someone going to prison. I'll be doing most of my work completely alone, but will occasionally need a ride, off the books, maybe vehicle access now and then."

Frank reassured her, "I'm here for you."

"Hey, you never did tell me what Armand helped you with."

"Armand was my dad's best friend; he is like an uncle. My dad stepped in front of Armand and took a bullet for him during an arms deal; Armand promised him he would look after me before he died. Later, I found myself in trouble with some drug runners, Armand came to the rescue."

Vivian replied, "That's poetic."

He thought for a second, "Yeah, I guess it is."

They returned to the crescent city and Vivian wasted no time getting involved. Sasha and Tanya had been keeping the house open for Vivian in her absence. Two girls, both in their twenties, both runaways, both escaped a local pimp and were now hiding out at the house. Of course, Vivian wanted to know their stories right away.

They gathered at a huge table in the dining room for dinner at about seven. Caterers were more common simply because they could afford it. Vivian asked the girls questions about their situation and determined that she would get involved and apply some justice on her behalf. "If it's ok with you, I can fix this, for good."

"You can?" one of the girls asked.

Vivian's responded with a wink.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm not sure yet, but it'll be righteous."

Sasha watched Vivian's face for clues while she talked with the girls. Sasha worried about Vivian. Even back in the neighborhood growing up, it always seemed that Vivian was going against the grain and needed a little support. Sasha asked Vivian, "What are you thinking of doing, girl?"

"I'm thinking to go undercover, kind of like Venezuela but not as dangerous. I'll be a new girl in town with no connections, hiding from an abusive family. I'm going to show up on his turf, and without delay, I'm betting he'll be all up over me. He'll try to get me back to his place for a snorkel of heroin, but I'll get him all alone in a cheap hotel and grant many girl's wishes for this guy to go away."

The second girl interjected, "No, you can't do that. He's mean as shit, he'll hurt you bad and just laugh at you."

Vivian took the girls hands and with perfect pitch told them, "Baby, that's why I have to do this. Girls ain't safe out there with these people. They are predators of the worst kind. Believe me, when people see their life flash before their eyes, they all pray to somebody, and my face will be the last thing they see. I'm not just going to take their life, honey, I'm taking their soul and the best part is, they will know it, and that fear will be their retribution and penance."

These girls came to them down hard from the streets and were as scared as any runaway, lost in mean and heartless city, might be. Vivian was an angel providing them shelter and standing up for them. She could have stated outright that she was going to brutally murder someone, and those girls would still have praised her.

A little time went by and Patty, the bigger of the two girls admitted to Vivian, "Ms. Vee, I don't feel too good."

"What's the matter?"

"JJ's been giving me shit and I haven't had any in a while, I don't feel good," and Patty started to snuffle.

Vivian turned to Tanya, “Sugar, can you take Patty and Gracie to your friend from the clinic. They got to come off that shit safely and right away.”

Sasha asked Vivian, “JJ, as in JJ Dietz?”

Vivian replied, “Oh, you have to be kidding me, is that son of a bitch still around. I forgot all about JJ.” Vivian began to laugh, “Ain’t karma a bitch.”

Sasha recalled, “Remember when he tried to steal us away from Joey, and Joey beat his ass and took two of his girls?”

Vivian laughed again, “Yeah, and when the cops came, he actually reported that someone stole his girls and admitted to solicitation.”

Tanya joined in on her way out the door, “Don’t forget about that ten-year-old that came up missing. Everyone thought it was him.”

With a condescending tone, Vivian proclaimed, “For the sake of justice and the pursuit of peace and happiness, I believe it my duty to act as judge, jury, and executioner and dispatch heaven’s wrath upon JJ Dietz. Highly illegal, totally unconstitutional, and debatably wrong, however, my calling transcends this social cesspool we live in. Is it agreed?” She concluded by scanning everyone’s facial expressions. Everyone seemed to agree.

JJ Dietz was a filthy scum bag that preyed upon the weak from the Promenade to the French Quarter back when Vivian was a teenager. It was a time in her life when harsh and cruel lessons were all they had.

Sasha told Vivian, “How about I get some info on his whereabouts, his routine, his schedule? We’ll get some photos, sit down, and plan this shit out right.”

Vivian said, “Talking about photos, can anyone dig up a photo or newspaper article about that girl. I think, leaving her picture pinned to his chest would give the FBI something to keep them busy.”

Patty and Gracie were both admitted into an in-house rehabilitation at Tulane Medical Center, one of the finest in the country, on Vivian's dime.

Within three days, Vivian had all the information she needed to impose justice on one JJ Dietz. She carried a copy of the New Orleans Tribune article about Sandra Thibodeau, a ten-year-old girl that went missing without a clue, fourteen years ago, from the Garden District. It was long suspected of being a drive by abduction.

Vivian dressed less fortunately than normal, to leave a more needy perception. She stepped out of a cab and started walking away from North Claiborne Ave up Orleans Ave. Over to the left, she could see how the lack of maintenance made certain houses look less than desirable. They were typically abandoned homes that may never be sold due to a declining population. It was like a part of the city dying. Fourth house down on the left she saw lights in the back of the house and heard faint music echoing off the house to the left. This house existed as a crack house today, but tomorrow they'll move to another. It made it more difficult for the cops to catch them, and eventually they quit trying.

As Vivian approached the house, she could feel her excitement meter rise. Being face to face with JJ Dietz was a perk she couldn't have imagined. She snuck right in through the front door, quietly, without drawing suspicion and shuffled her way through the dark house toward the room with light coming from under the door. She followed the sound of Carlos Santana down the hallway, stepping over a couple passed out junkies. She opened the door and low and behold, there he was JJ Dietz, in the flesh. He was in his early fifties by now and looking bad, beat up, scrawny, and strung out, but he was just as mean as always. He was attempting to strap a girl down so he could shoot her up with heroine. Vivian stood at the door, looked to the left and right quickly, then back to Dietz, who had his back to the open door.

She rushed into the room and wrapped her left hand over his mouth and placed her dagger to his throat. Vivian recently and officially renamed her knife 'Sweetie' after Sadie, and told Dietz, "You are the proverbial scum of the earth, move an inch and Sweetie will open your throat right here, right now."

Given just a moment to figure out what was going on, JJ put his hands up. Vivian turned him around, took her hand off his mouth, and her knife directly against his chest, told the girl, "Go baby, get away, I'll take care of this."

The girl forced herself away from JJ, who was starting to think a little more boldly now that he could see his opponent. Vivian kept her left hand on his shirt to keep him at the optimal distance. "I wanted you to know that Patty and Gracie send their regards," and before he could process who she was referring to and respond, she thrust her knife into his chest, pulled it out and stabbed him again. To muffle his screams, she sliced his throat from right to left and let him drop back to the floor. As he laid on the floor, gurgling and gasping for air, she leaned over him, "and for Sandra Thibodeau, you've earned a badge." Vivian slashed a V in his forehead while he still had a few seconds of life left, then pinned the article to his shirt.

The girl ran out of the house as soon as she was released, without witnessing the gruesome sight, and would later praise the angel that saved her from hell. Her story would be just one of many that would be told in the months to come.

Sasha and Tanya begged for the details of the mission and Vivian didn't let them down. She described the thoughts going through both her mind and his, while they pierced into each other's eyes. She told of his fear, and her satisfaction, and there's an argument to be made about the pathology, but for the victims feeling redemption, justice had finally been served.

The body count rose from March to May to five. All despicable social degenerates and known criminally violent

offenders. Nobody seemed to care that these people were being targeted, except of course the FBI.

Meanwhile rumors spread throughout the city that the patron saint of hookers was protecting the city. Vivian hated that term hooker. Prostitute, was acceptable because it implied a profession, as opposed to hooker, which just sounded like a cheap con to her.

During breakfast one morning, Vivian told Sasha, “Everyone acts surprised that these assholes are associated with prostitution, kidnaping, trafficking, or slavery. They are not going to get any sympathy from the many housewives, girlfriends, mothers, and daughters that remain in dangerous relationships. What if they were inspired by our effects, to hold society accountable? What if they start fighting back for themselves? What if, Ms. Average American woman, decided she wasn’t going to take her boyfriend’s abuses anymore, would they need us anymore?”

Sasha pined, “Wouldn’t that be something. I can see it.”

Vivian paused and looking into Sasha’s eyes, “I’ve been thinking, you’ve always been there for me, it’s my turn to take care of you. Do you have enough money, do you need help?”

Sasha felt true concern in Vivian voice, “What are you saying girl? Sounds like you’re fixing to leave again.”

“I am. I have to. It’s only a short amount of time, Vanessa Wakefield’s fingerprints resurface, and match the Castle Rouge investigation. Everybody will show up to the party. There’s no way around it, I have to go. Besides, I need time to get my head right. I don’t have Sadie here to keep me on track.”

Sasha felt the pain in her voice, but she also felt the pain in her own heart, “Baby, you’ve been on the run from the day we met, some day you are going to have to slow down.”

Vivian acknowledged her concern and tried to downplay it. “I have an idea. Suppose girls had to defend themselves, if rumor could blame me, to deflect guilt away from our family, so

be it. It will make it that much harder for them to get the real facts. Even if they slice a V in their head, I'm ok being the bogymen.

Sasha said with concern, "Baby, you're already a hero, you don't need everyone else's problems or crimes."

Vivian smiled, "I'm not looking for notoriety, but it's a good reminder to all the bad guys out there that I'm still out there and will be watching. As for me, I'm thinking Hawaii."

"What happened with the DA? I thought you had a deal."

"She's not going to be able to stop an investigation; she has to play along or recuse herself. Either way, it was a bad deal."

Vivian decided this was as good of a time to say goodbye as any, "I'll get in touch with you after I get set up, you and Tanya should come visit."

Sasha put her hand on Vivian's cheek, "Baby, you're going to be the death of me, I worry about you." She pulled her close and gave her a hug.

## Chapter Five

Frank picked Vivian up just as the sun began to fall behind the shallow and distant skyline of the city. She took one large bag with her, everything else she left for Sasha and Tanya to care for and use. Frank talked her into a quick stop overnight in LA to rest from a twenty-hour day. What she didn't know was that he was planning to meet with someone about selling precious Gulf Stream. When they got to the hotel, Frank asked Vivian if she'd like to get a drink. Of course, she said yes.

Frank canvased the lounge and spotted the captain sitting at a table alone, Frank asked her, "Vee, I see a man I really need to meet, do you mind meeting him with me?"

"Not at all, I'd love to meet your friends."

Ralph Brennen was a retired pilot for United Airlines who spent the past ten years buying and selling aircraft from Seattle to Miami. He reminded her of Jack Benny, able to insult someone to their face and make it funny. He stood, when Frank and Vivian approached the table, and put out his hand to shake Vivian's hand, then Frank's, and introduced himself, "Ralph Brennen, my friends call me the captain."

Vivian graciously nodded, "Pleased to meet you. Are you in the military?"

Ralph laughed, "No, I flew commercial jets."

"Hi, Captain," Frank said.

"My boy, I have good news for you, I have a buyer,"

"How much?" Frank asked.

Ralph told him, "Twenty-two five."

Frank hated to get rid of his plane, it just became too costly, but to make matters worse, he learned about depreciation. "I have only had this thing two years and I stand to lose five million. This is a hard decision."

"Really, Franky my boy, how much money did that plane make you?"



“You got me there.”

“It’s about two million more than what I would have given you,” the captain sadly admitted.

Frank knew he was right, then realized the captain’s ten percent was covered in the sale. “Ok, it’s a deal.”

It took most of the discussion before Vivian finally pieced together what he was doing and didn’t want to interfere in his dealings, so she sat back and watched them get along.

Frank made arrangements with the captain to transfer custody of his plane in Hawaii so he could make Vivian’s trip his last. After the meeting, Vivian asked, “Why did you sell your plane, I thought you loved it?”

“I did, but it was too expensive to keep, I’d have to work all the time, but I’d rather take a little time and relax a while. That’s why Hawaii’s perfect, I can even buy a smaller plane and not have to go into debt.”

He sold it well, but Vivian knew, deep down, it hurt. She saw disappointment in his eyes and couldn’t help feeling responsible.

Halfway across the Pacific, Vivian poured her third drink, and recalled what Sasha said about her always running. She realized; she wasn’t running away ‘from’ trouble; she was running away ‘with’ trouble. This move to Hawaii wouldn’t be any different, trouble will find her there because she creates it wherever she goes. In her moment of clarity, she reflected on how she ran from New Orleans, then from Biloxi, and then from Paris, and now from New Orleans again. ‘When will it stop?’ Was the unanswerable question.

She couldn’t see a fairy tale ending to her story but looked toward the cockpit with a childish desire. She wanted to believe that dreams could come true, even if the evidence was stacked up against her. She thought of all the sacrifices Frank had made for her; selling his plane and relocating to Hawaii was all the math she needed. Convinced that this may be her last chance at

happiness, she walked up and sat with Frank. “Why are you so good to me?”

“Excuse me?” he asked.

“From the moment we met, you’ve been doing things for me and rarely ask for anything.”

Frank replied, “When Armand asked me to keep an eye out for you, he didn’t specify a time range. I’m still on the clock.”

“Oh bullshit,” she laughed. “Selling your plane is quite a commitment.”

“The plane cost too much. I have to work too much, to be able to afford it. I’ll take my equity and by me a toy in Hawaii and fly around the islands for a while, maybe start a business.”

“And that’s it?” she questioned.

“Well, maybe there’s something about you that makes me want to be around you all the time. I hope that didn’t come out sounding creepy.”

She scoffed, “Darling, my heart has been broken three times. I don’t think I can handle another. You see, trouble follows me and people near me get hurt. I don’t want you to get hurt but I don’t know how to be anyone other than myself.”

Frank smiled at her and extended his hand. She took it and he told her, “I propose we buy or build a house on the north shore and open a local travel agency and bar. You can run the bar.”

Now it was him responding to quell her emotional pains and look toward a brighter future. She thought to herself, ‘well played Frank Miller, well played.’ “I hadn’t thought of that but now that you have, I kind of like the idea.” She sat comfortably back in the co-pilot’s chair till they made their approach in Honolulu.

Meanwhile back in New Orleans, hell was being paid. Wives, mothers, girlfriends, and daughters were standing up for themselves across the city and slowly started showing up across state. Cases of domestic violence and assault spiked. Sasha passed on Vivian’s wish that if anyone had to act in self-defense or

against a pervert anywhere, they should slice a V in their forehead as a badge of dishonor. It would also serve well to keep the investigation convoluted and taint it with doubt. All the precincts within the inner city were overwhelmed with cases of men being attacked and slashed. Every day the news cycle started with slasher stories and ended the same.

Sasha explained to Tanya while they were walking across the street, "Do you feel that?"

"Feel what?" she replied.

"Peace. You can walk down the street again without clenching your purse and a finger on a can of mace. I was getting tired of looking over your shoulder."

Tanya admitted, "I didn't notice, but know that you mention it, it does feel safer around here."

They continued walking down the street with a little spring in their step, all the way home. When they reached the house, there were two detectives from the eighth district waiting. They introduced themselves, "I'm detective Gale and this is detective Garcia, we're looking for Vanessa Wakefield."

"Can't help you, don't know no Vanessa Wakefield," Sasha remarked defensively.

"Sure, you do, you worked with her in Biloxi a few years back," detective Gale recalled.

"Oh, you must mean Vee, no, I haven't seen her."

Detective Gale handed Sasha one of the DA's business cards and suggested, "If you do see her, can you ask her to call Ms. Whitman."

"Whatever," she grabbed the card and walked past them with Tanya in tow.

The detectives watched them walk into the house then turned and got back into their car and drove off.

Tanya asked Sasha, "How did they know to ask us about Vee?"

Sasha replied, “I want to know how they found us. They must already have us under surveillance. Vee ain’t going to like this.” She looked at her watch, “Ten o’clock, that means it should be about five in the morning. That’s too early, we’ll wait till after lunch to call her.”

Vivian’s first night in Hawaii was spent at the Reef Hotel on Waikiki. She marveled in Frank’s ability to make her feel comfortable and that he seemed comfortable around her. Vivian’s phone rang while she was in the bathroom. When Frank saw the caller ID with a New Orleans area code, he answered it by saying, “Hi, this is Frank, hold on I’m taking the phone to Vee.”

Frank knocked on the bathroom door and called out, “Vee, I have your phone, New Orleans is calling.”

She opened the door, standing naked in front of Frank, she gracefully took the phone from Frank’s hand and slowly shut the door, leaving him speechless and stunned. The saying that you can’t unsee something was invented for images like that. Frank’s imagination will forever be satisfied by the memory.

“Hey girl, what’s happening?” Vivian asked upon closing the door.

“Couple dicks came by asking for Vanessa Wakefield?”

Vivian didn’t seem too surprised, “I figured they would, it was only a matter of time.”

Sasha replied, “This was different, they want you to call the DA, they gave me her card.”

“What’s the number?” Vivian asked.

“Are you seriously going to call her?” Sasha asked.

“I might as well. I need something, she needs something, maybe we can agree on something. I don’t want to have to stay hidden for the rest of my life, even though I’m in a pretty good place right now.”

Sasha gave her the number and reminded her, “You best find another way to get in touch with us, they’re probably tracing our phones. That’s why I called you on CJ’s phone.”

Vivian assured her, “I think it will be fine, how about give me a few days and call me back from the bar and I’ll fill you in. I’ve dealt with these judicial bureaucrats before, they’re just legal sluts. If I can make them look good, they’ll make a deal.”

Sasha, always the big sister, urged her to be careful. “Baby, I don’t like it, I don’t trust them, none of them.”

Vivian thanked her, “Thanks for the heads up, I’ll let you know how our conversation goes. Keep Tanya out of trouble.”

Sasha reminded herself, “Shit, Tanya’s going to be pissed when she finds out I talked to you. She wanted to talk to you too.

“Just tell her she can be the one to call me, how about Thursday?”

“Ok. Hey, isn’t this starting to look a lot like Castle Rouge, another city, another DA, another murder. Are we detecting any patterns?”

Vivian didn’t listen to too many people; Sasha was one of them and the sarcasm stung but she knew Sasha was right.”

Vivian sighed and consoled Sasha, “I didn’t mean for everyone to get caught up in my stuff.”

“Nobody does, and everybody does. It’s painful to include your friends in bad situations, I understand, but you’re a leader, a good leader, and sometimes people must come together to achieve change. We’re all behind you. Besides, we came this far.” Those were rare words of encouragement, but enough at the right time to make a difference.

When Vivian stepped off the plane in Hawaii, she felt liberated. The islands were beautiful and full of wonder. Frank was a handsome man with a strong and interesting swagger. Vivian felt on the edge of loneliness and lost to a dream of romance. She told him that night, “Everyone that’s been close to me has either hurt me or I hurt them. I’m afraid that being too close to me is dangerous. I don’t want you to get hurt and I certainly don’t want to be hurt again, I’m at a loss for what to do.”

Frank understood her concerns, “I know Vee, we just have to play the cards we’re dealt. We can worry about the future together, or we can enjoy the future together. Our chances together are much greater than apart.”

“I’ve had to run away four times; I really don’t want to run any more. I’m going to call the DA back in New Orleans tomorrow, and see what’s on her mind, I’m hoping she’s not just giving me a warning.”

“What are you into, Vee?” He asked curiously.

“Nothing much, I just have an arrangement with the DA. I took care of her problem, and she’s helping to protect me, from persecution, so far anyway.”

“Cell phone records are going to tell them where you are, you know?” Frank said.

Vivian agreed, “You’re right. I can’t call her from my phone or a phone on the island if they have her wire tapped, and I must assume they do. Maybe we should fly back to the states to call her. They have nothing to connect Vanessa Wakefield, to Vivian Bouvier, or Veronica Caine. If I can keep my fingerprints to myself, I have nothing to worry about.”

Frank asked, “How did they find your friends?”

Vivian admitted, “I don’t know. Vanessa had been fingerprinted But I’ve never been printed as Vivian or Veronica. The house was bought under my real name, and Sasha and Tanya were never associated, only to Vanessa, unless of course they managed to get a hold of Sasha and Tanya’s Juvey record. That would be just another reason to topple their legal corruption. There are constitutional reasons those records are sealed.”

Frank reminded himself, “You know, for as long as I’ve been doing stuff for Armond, I never had an alias. I suppose I should feel lucky, with my Gulfstream, recording everywhere I went, I could have easily been found. In comparison, I can’t help but to feel uncertain for the future, I never wanted to get so close to police, especially ones that were looking for me.”

Vivian understood his apprehensions and offered, “Sasha can get her cousin to set you up with a new identity, I don’t think you’ll need it for very long, but you’ll always have it to fall back on if you have to disappear again.”

Vivian’s first stop was a bank. She opened an account under Veronica Caine and had money transferred from her Swiss account, then opened another at a different bank Vivian Bouvier and had money transferred from one to the other. She decided to stay with her real identity in the local community and could stay off the grid using cash.

Renting, buying, or building, was her next step. “I would like to be out of this hotel in a week or so,” She told him, upon returning to their room. “First thing in the morning we need to call some realtors and see what’s around here.”

“I have to get back in touch with the captain. If anyone could find a good deal on a small craft, it would be him, that’s what he does. Hey, when I get a new plane, do you want me to teach you to fly?”

Learning to fly never occurred to her, but after a brief review, a sudden rush of excitement urged her response, “Hell yeah, maybe I can learn sky diving too. I think this vacation life may be just what I need. I’ve tried vacationing before, but this feels more like a change in lifestyle I can relate, for the exception of surfing.”

Frank responded with a playful retort, “Oh, that’s the best part. Some of the best surfing in the world is right here.”

They stayed up for hours talking about and planning their enterprise. Vivian had listed all the nuances of her seaside bar and party central and would call it “Hale,” meaning home. Frank wanted a small piece of land big enough to build a runway, or at least have easy access to a nearby airfield and a hanger. As they talked and made their plans, Vivian was overtaken with a sense of peace and prosperity, a feeling that eluded her, even in her happiest times at Chateau de la Fontaine. She looked at Frank

with wanting eyes and refused to take no for an answer. Frank was all the more willing to expose his insecurities for her affection. Their connection was growing stronger and could easily be seen in the way they embraced. Their natural rhythm slowed, their touch seemed softer, and the kisses more passionate. A lonely tear rolled off her cheek in fear that she would wake in the morning and find it was all a dream or that it would fall apart all too soon.

While Vivian was experiencing love all over again, New Orleans started to level out. Sasha was true to her word and gave Tanya, Vivian's number, and called her from the bar. Tanya spoke on the phone, "Hey girl, how's the fun in the sun? I wish I could be there."

"You should be," Vivian replied. "You and Sasha get on a plane and get your asses out here; I'll buy your tickets."

Tanya asked, "Can't Frank come get us?"

"No, honey, I'm sorry to say that Frank sold the plane." Vivian went on to give her all the updates, from their vocational plans to her sexual escapades. Frank got a little embarrassed and left her to have a private conversation.

"So, what did that DA have to say?"

Vivian replied, "I haven't called her yet. Do you know what she wanted?"

"I better let Sasha tell you, she knows more than I do."

Tanya gave Sasha the phone, "Vee, your girl's resigning. She got herself into political trouble for not pursuing the V attacks as hard as the media wanted her to. So, instead of opening everything into one big investigation and calling out the national guard, she is taking an early retirement. The two detectives dropped a box of evidence off for you as a reminder that MS. Whitman was a woman of her word."

"Darling, can you destroy that stuff for me?"

"I already did, baby. I burnt it the day he gave it to me. They had some interesting stuff gathered up too, they even had a



few photographs, some sneaky ass shit. This place has changed since you left, Vee. People ain't afraid to go out anymore, well, not as much as they used to anyway. All the perps are looking over their shoulders, even the visitors to the city don't seem as rude as they used to. I don't know how long it will last, but the girls around here worship you girl. New rumors are spreading every day, I think Tuesday you saved the Pope. Some of the people are calling you, Angel of Death, others refer to you as a Dark Angel, and some just call you the vigilante, and most all these girls here want to be you."

"Some of that's interesting, but those girls don't need to try and be like me, I'm a psychopath, a loveable psychopath, but one just the same. I was taken past my breaking point; I wouldn't want that for any of them. If you see Ms. Whitman, tell her I could use a good lawyer."

Tanya chimed in, "Are you're going give her a job?"

"Yeah, if she'll work for me. We need a good lawyer and one that has experienced prosecuting cases would know all the dirty tricks they use. She's perfect. As my lawyer, she's professionally bound to secrecy, we could use her legal mind."

Sasha replied, "Ok then, I'll get in touch with her and pass her the offer. So, why is Tanya packing?"

Vivian laughed, "I Invited you and her to come out here, apparently, she must be ready to go. Something else, can you get your cousin to get Frank a new identity, just in case, birth certificate, social security, driver's license, passport, the whole nine yards? Six feet two, two hundred pounds, brown hair, and eyes, I'll send you a photo."

Sasha assured her, "Yeah, we can make that happen, it'll probably take about a week, maybe two."

"Ok, call me at this new number when you get it." Vivian gave her the number to her new cell phone, "or maybe y'all can deliver it in person. You'll love it here, it's beautiful."

“Take care of yourself, girl, there’s still people out there gunning for you.”

“I love you both,” Vivian hung up. She turned and filled Frank in on all they had talked about.

“You know, a new DA will undoubtedly open or reopen an investigation,” Frank said nervously.

Vivian wasn’t as worried, “Hopefully, we’ll have a lawyer on retainer, someone who knows and could hire some inside police assistance. Those two detectives wouldn’t have turned over that evidence unless they believed in Ms. Whitman. There’s also the fact that dozens of vigilante attacks have been going on in my absence, a new DA is not going to know where to start.”

“I hope you’re right.”

She tried to sound comforting when she told him, “Regardless of what happens in life, we just have to be able to adjust. My grandmother used to say, *C’est la vie*, ‘That’s Life.’ I say we live it while we can.”

Frank reflected, “I think I would have like your grandmother.”

Vivian laughed, “No, sweetheart, I don’t think you would have. She came from a different time and didn’t see the world the same as we do.”

“So, she’s who you got your fighting spirit from? That makes her more interesting. Tell me something about her only you knew.”

Vivian asked, “What?”

He repeated, “Tell me something about your grandmother that nobody else knows.”

“Why?”

“Please.”

“Ok,” she said and thought for a moment. “She put a curse on her daughter, my mother when she dropped me off at her house and split.”

Frank admitted, “Maybe you’re right. Maybe I wouldn’t like her.”

Vivian followed up on his inquiry, “Now you have to tell me something about your family no one else knows.”

He paused for a moment, he wasn’t ready to answer his own question, “Well, my mother was accused of fooling around with my dad’s best friend, during the time that I was conceived, it’s possible that my dad is not my dad.”

She replied with empathy, “Awe, I’m sorry. I can see that causing an identity crisis, I have that too.”

He looked at her and mentioned, “There’s more. My dad’s best friend was Armand.”

Vivian’s eye widened in humorous surprise, “Oh, I get it. Hell, I think that’s kind of great. I love Armand.”

“Me too,” Frank admitted. “But, what if he’s not, what then?”

She asked him, “Have you talked with him about this?”

“No, all he’s ever said was that he loved my mom and dad and promised to look after me, I didn’t take it for anything else until I did a little research.”

“We got some messed up families don’t we,” Vivian giggled and detected a gleam in Frank’s curious eyes.

Frank smiled and held Vivian’s hand with both of his. “I wonder what children of ours will become?”

Vivian was rapidly approaching thirty and never once did motherhood come into question. She was a viral woman and was aware of internal clock, but the horrors of adolescence had been a great deterrent. “Frank, darling, we’re narrowly escaped and we’re not out of the woods, before we legitimately talk out us as a family, can we find the safety and security to provide first?”

“Of course,” he said.

They relaxed a bit, cooled the hormonal challenges, and began discussing their immediate needs and short-term goals. For the next four days, they went over property option until they came

across a local woman leasing land and a pub on the beach at the north shore. Frank was hysterical, had been to the north shore once before, “This is it, this is perfect,” he said. “As a teen, I came here in the winter when the waves were massive and powerful. This is a surfer paradise, a lot of vacation money flowing around, tourists pay big to island hop and see Hawaii from the air. If there’s a God in heaven, let this deal go through and give us our paradise.”

Vivian said, “I didn’t know you were religious.”

“I’m not, I’m just not taking any chances, this is too perfect.” Vivian understood without doubt, he wanted this place. Frank mentioned, “Yeah, summer’s coming, do you want to learn to surf? It’s the perfect time to learn here. The summer seas are calmer than the winter seas.”

Frank wouldn’t have known, but Vivian was afraid of the water and had to admit, “Sorry darling, I don’t do water. I love being on the water, in a nice, big, safe, boat, but being in the water is out of the question. I say you surf; I’ll parasail.”

They agreed while staring into each other’s love-struck eyes. Life was beginning to take on a new meaning. Slowly, the little things came together. They arrived at Leilani’s property just in time for breakfast. Leilani’s family owned around eighty acres in and around the northern part of Oahu, where the real estate values were some of the highest in the world. Vivian’s proposal came at the perfect time for both. Leilani was in her mid-forties and widow of a local hero. Her husband jumped into the water to save a little boy from drowning in the middle of a hurricane. He held the boy above water for more than thirty minutes as the storm carried them out to sea. He held the boy above the water, kicking hard to keep them afloat for as long as he did. A coast guard helicopter dropped a rescue swimmer and hoisted the boy to safety, but as soon as the boy had the harness around him, the father lost all his energy and calmly floated away and disappeared into the waves.

Vivian stepped forward and extended her hand, “Ms. Leilani, it is a pleasure to meet you and may I express my sincere condolences for your loss.”

“Thank you, so, you were looking to lease some land?”

“Yes ma’am, we want to make this our home.”

“How much are you looking for?” Leilani asked.

Vivian reached out to her soul with the touch of her hand on the back of Leilani’s, “We can help each other. I’d like to build a cabana bar, small house near the beach, and have enough room for an aircraft hangar.”

Frank butted in, “Helicopter, I changed my mind, not a plane, a helicopter.”

Leilani looked confused, and Vivian laughed, “A boy and their toys, right?”

“Your realtor said you might be interested in buying my bar and some land?”

“Actually, I’d just like to lease it for about ten years, with an option to buy.”

Leilani asked, “What kind of money are you talking?”

Vivian looked at Frank, then at Leilani, “How does ten thousand dollars a month sound?”

Leilani was able to make a living at her bar, but raising her kids without a father didn’t help, and having enough money to send her kids to college was huge. She replied, “How about twenty thousand a month?”

Vivian thought, ‘ok, she willing to negotiate,’ Vivian replied back with a counteroffer, “Ten thousand a month for a ten-year lease was over a million dollars and it allowed to you keep your land. How about fifteen thousand a month and I can pay you all of it up front?”

“Why such a generous offer, are you running from something?”

Vivian stated, “I used to run away, but I’ve found, it’s better to run toward. In my life, I desperately needed to find

peace. I used to wake up eagerly ready to challenge the day in search of anything of value. Now I feel the need to relax and appreciate the wonderful world around me, and the people. I am so pleased to have this opportunity to share with you, a sense of belonging.”

Leilani snickered, “You’re still running.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Vivian smiled in return. A strange glance was all it took; Leilani saw a sisterhood in Vivian and agreed to the deal. She kept a pretty straight face but inside knew that being able to keep the family land, send all her kids to school and be able to live extremely comfortable without having to work was a dream come true, but she didn’t want to jinx the deal. Vivian wrote her a check from her new account and called the bank to inform them of the pending transaction. She asked Leilani, “Is it customary to celebrate a mutually beneficial deal?”

“Yes, it is,” she replied.

“If I finance it, will you hold a luau?”

“You assume, because I’m Hawaii, I hold luaus.”

“I saw the fire pit in the back,” Vivian joked.

“Yeah, you got me, you’re pretty sharp. If you’re buying, we’ll have a big ass luau, don’t you worry. Do you want me to just give you a bill?”

Vivian smiled, “Perfect, we’re going to get along perfect,” and gave her a quick hug. “Sisters,” was all she said. It was a little outside of Leilani’s comfort zone, but didn’t feel threatened, she felt lucky.

Frank walked all around the property looking for the best area to build a hanger and Vivian watched the customer interactions at the bar. She saw for the first time, a carefree lifestyle she could relate to. She wasn’t a surfer but shared their enthusiasm for thrills.

Frank thought about the runway issue and explained to Vivian that he could buy a plane, rent some hanger space at the airfield ten miles away, or he could take some lessons and get

licensed for a helicopter. Because he could keep it in his back yard for a quick getaway, or easy evac in case of disaster, he chose the helicopter.

Vivian said, “Why not have both?”

“I think it’s a lot of money,” Frank said while trying to do the math in his head.

“Honey, I’m here, I got you covered, you only live once, but you can die inside many times. Don’t give yourself a reason to regret it; you need a good plane. We have places to go, things to do, people to see, and if you want to expand your travel agency to quick and easier hops around the islands, you should. You can teach me to fly.”

“You just got through writing a check for two million dollars. After paying off the plane, I still have three million left, I could have helped.”

Vivian smiled, “Don’t worry sweetheart, I got the feeling you’re going to be coming off some of that money real soon.”

Before leaving to go back to the hotel, Leilani asked where they were staying.

Frank replied, “We’re at the Reef Hotel, suite 510.”

“We have bungalows right over here, excuse me, you have bungalows over here, it’s all part of the property you’re leasing, it’s yours to manage.” Leilani reminded them.

Vivian’s face lit up, “Yeah, come Frank, let’s go get our stuff.” She then turned back to Leilani, “Please consider hanging around here as a manager on payroll.”

Leilani was having a hard time processing everything that was going on. Yesterday, life was tough, she was a happy person, but the challenges were many, now she is watching all her challenges fall to the side and looking into the face of prosperity.

Life was getting exciting for Vivian too, but not so much for Sasha and Tanya. Ever since Ms. Whitman resigned and a new DA took over, more and more pressure was placed on the police

chief and the prosecutor's office to get to the bottom of the vigilante that started this whole mess.

Ms. Whitman had detective Gale and Garcia on her side, but that's a small account. Both detectives have had family members attacked by criminals awaiting trial. Released by bureaucrats in the justice system and supported by the courts, these thugs should never have been released before trial. Sometime the ends do justify the means. They were sympathetic to the cause, which made them more loyal to Ms. Whitman than the corrupt system they were forced to operate in.

A new detective showed up at Vivian's house in New Orleans. Sasha addressed him at the front door. "What do you want?" she questioned.

The detective could easily see that she wasn't pleased to have him at her door. "I'm sorry Ms., I'm looking for Vanessa, Vanessa Wakefield."

Sasha exclaimed, "I'm sure you are, but she ain't here."

"I'm detective McCauley, we know that she knows something about these attacks. We have her fingerprints on one of the victim's faces, we think she might be in trouble."

Sasha wasted no time getting in his face, "You're a lying pig. You don't have her fingerprint, cause if you did, you wouldn't tell me, you don't think she's in trouble, you're searching for ghosts."

"Ma'am, we're all trying to make the city a better place, we get it, but if she's doing things, we just want her to stop and let us do our job. There's a lot of powerful and very corrupt people spending a lot of money to find her."

"Look, we ain't seen Vee in months."

"Yet, you live in her house?" he said.

"She's a very generous person. Unless you got a warrant, you can get the hell out of here and go to hell."

He walked away but Sasha knew he wasn't going anywhere. She told Tanya, "They'll be staking out the house next,



hell, they probably already been inside and planted bugs all over the place. Girl, you can't trust them bastards. What do you say we send them on a wild goose chase? I'll buy five Saints jerseys and you get five identical scarves from Nordstrom or somewhere. I go to the AA meeting down at the center wearing a Saints jersey and scarf, five people come out wearing a Saints jersey and scarf. I'll lose them and call Vee from the bar. If we're being tailed, that'll keep them busy. Just follow me and watch the watchers."

"I'll take pictures of them," Tanya said. "Maybe Garcia, Gale, or Ms. Whitman know something about them."

She called and talked to Vivian, gave her all the details that she could remember. Vivian relaxed her with a calm and unconcerned voice, "Thanks, it'll be fine, I'll send you a post card from the Grand Canyon, that'll get them wasting resources looking in the desert."

Frank butted in, "Grand Canyon?"

"Yeah, that young couple at the bar are on their honeymoon. They're from Kansas and I overheard her asking him to visit the Grand Canyon on their way home."

"When did you talk to them?" Frank inquired.

She laughed, "You don't have to talk to people to learn things, I overheard some of their conversation, their body language says all you need to know about newlyweds. I'll give them three-hundred-dollars to mail a postcard from the Grand Canyon when they get there so our 'family' will think we're on vacation at the Grand Canyon."

Frank muttered, "Interesting, by the way, I'm going to be talking with the captain tomorrow and ask him to find both a plane, and a helicopter, depending on the cost. You know, I can only fly one at a time anyway, if we have to bug out, you'd have to fly one."

"Agreed," she said.

Ms. Whitman agreed to talk with Vivian on the terms of her retainage. Ms. Whitman flew to Honolulu at Vivian's expense

and Vivian picked her up personally at the airport. "I'm glad you came; I hear things got out of control at home."

Ms. Whitman no longer looked at Vivian as a monster but more as a patriot. "Yeah, citizens became involved, the politicians appointed themselves arbitrators of justice for a price. They tried to trap me; I chose otherwise."

Vivian asked, "Well, what should I call you? Ms. Whitman seems too formal,"

"I'm sorry, Kate, call me Kate."

"I'll set you up in a bungalow at my place out at the beach, you'll love it. We can go over my offer at dinner, tonight."

Kate asked, "Roughly, what kind of services are you looking for?"

Vivian said, "I have money and property management issues, I have an identity to retain and another to hide, I also have friends to protect."

"I suppose we'll have an interesting dinner."

Vivian smiled and directed her toward the car rental.

Everything seemed to be falling into place. The captain found Frank a Cessna 206 and an Airbus/Eurocopter 355 for nine hundred thousand dollars combined. Both were about two years old, not a lot of miles, it was a good deal and Frank was pleasantly surprised. He was afraid it would cost him a couple million and didn't want to spend everything he had. Vivian began taking flying lessons in the Cessna, their new beach house was being built, Frank was surfing every other day, and flying tourists around the islands when he wasn't surfing.

## Chapter Six

Residents noticed that the number of attacks against working girls, significantly decreased, and as such, the number of cases of vigilante justice decreased as well. The police department was not being pressured by the public, so the department focused more on getting back involved with the neighborhoods. All in all, the atmosphere in the city was happier than it had been in a long time. Music filled the streets in celebration again. This didn't change the minds of the few that saw these cases as a ticket to stardom, their fifteen minutes of fame.

A woman claimed revenge against her daughter's sexual attacker and the story claimed fame to many hours of TV coverage. That was all you heard on the news for three days. Her story would be one of many that would capture the city's heart and sense of justice. Vivian developed her own definition of justice and simply put, was efficient. Vivian's grandmother taught her some rare life skills, like being able to sense people's fears and joys. She was taught that when people do bad things, they should be punished, and if the punishment the people can provide is more efficient than that of the system, the people would adapt likewise. No one was helping the investigators, if anything, they were challenging the system's autonomous authority.

Within the next few months, things began to calm down and the city regained some degree of tempo. Girls were back to work, the bars and clubs were packed every night with the same cast of characters, and there was money flowing throughout the business district again. Yet the underlying enigma of V, and the idea that the city's vigilante was standing watch on the streets late at night, giving visitors a ghostly and spiritual experience. Knowing that someone could be lurking in the shadows, waiting to spring out and protect the innocent, became an attraction of its

own, and people became more aware of their surroundings. Everyone had to admit, the city was safer because of V.

Sasha and Tanya decided to keep the boys in blue as wasted of time as possible. They had fun leading them all over the city. Everywhere they went, girls were giving each other the peace sign, not for peace, but for ‘V.’

Gale and Garcia, new this new detective weaseled his way into the case by greasing his supervisor’s ass. Detective Gale told Ms. Whitman over the phone, “He’s a snake. You can count on him biting you. Oh, by the way, they think our girl’s name is Vanessa Wakefield and Vivian Bouvier. She was involved in a major crime scheme a few years back over in Mississippi.”

“Thank you,” Ms. Whitman said before hanging up the phone.

“Well, there you go, your name is officially out there and contaminated. It’s a good thing you have another.”

“Kate, Sarcasm? Really?” Vivian remarked.

“I didn’t mean it to sound sarcastic, but it’s a good thing. Vanessa Wakefield and Vivian Bouvier are now known, it’s ok, you still have Veronica Caine.

Vivian said, “I’d rather have my own identity, but I’ll settle for you keeping my ass out of jail.”

Kate noticed a little something about Vivian right then, she realized, Vivian broke things down to a basic set of principles and will stand up for her convictions. She saw that Vivian was academically qualified, socially gifted, wiser than the average girl, and had more womanly skills than any other she had met and yet, the only aspect of Vivian Ms. Whitman was interested in was her psychopathy. She wanted to know; what Vivian felt when she ended those two rapists’ lives. She felt she could live vicariously through Vivian, or at least admire the darker magic she created.

Kate asked her straight out, “How did it make you feel to kill my family’s killers?”

Vivian was taken back just a bit, “Excuse me?” she asked.

“I need closure. My husband and baby are gone, their killers are gone, I’m still here. If I could just share with you, good or bad, what their ultimate justice felt like, I can end the torment and get on with life.”

Vivian got a knot in her throat, and explained to Kate, “I am sorry darling, I’m afraid I have to sell you short. The truth is, for some people I feel nothing and for others I feel everything. Your shitheads were in the nothing column. However, I can tell you what it feels like to have a loved ripped away from you, I feel deeply for you. If you want to feel great satisfaction in knowing he died like a bitch, I can guarantee he died like a bitch.”

Kate replied, “I guess that’s all I was asking, being able to feel it, well, that would be something.”

Vivian understood her vengeful needs. She took Kate’s hand and held it close, looked her in the eyes, and told her, “Kate, I can do what I do because I don’t have feelings the same as everyone else. Watching someone’s soul, slowly leave their body, while they struggle to understand why they’ve been sentenced to death, would be a traumatic experience and would cause nightmares for normal people; me, not so much.”

Kate said, “Thank you for your candor, and I’m sorry for your loss.”

Vivian leaned in and gave Kate a hug, “There’s a lot more Justice in the world needed, we can still make a difference in this world. Can I count on you?”

Kate smiled, “I’ll give you the best legal advice possible. And possibly destroy some evidence if given the chance.”

Vivian chuckled, “Yeah, you did.”

For the next three months Ms. Whitman didn’t see much of Vivian, but she had her hands full with leases, mortgages, powers of attorney, deeds of trust, bank transfers, licenses, and bonds. All business, Kate was starting to feel a little disappointed, then one day mid-September, a young man, obviously from the states, chose to show his ass out in the Cabana. It was a beautiful

evening; the setting sun had just dropped over the horizon and the orange glow hit the night. An excitement filled the air of the cabana while everyone seemed to be having a wonderful night. Traditional Hawaiian music was softly playing in the near distance, a bright moon, lit the stage for romance. Kate's desire to see Vivian in action came all the sweeter, in this most perfect setting.

Kate returned to her table, scotch in hand, when suddenly, a handsome, but drunken young man, picked a fight with another customer. It started with the drunken vacationer spilling a drink on a sailor's girlfriend. Forever the honorable gentleman, the sailor stepped in to protect her. The man got pushy, so the sailor cleaned his clock. The man fell hard to the ground. He stumbled back up and grabbed the sailor's girlfriend and a bottle off the bar. He broke the bottle on the edge of the bar to use as a weapon and shielded himself with the girl.

When Vivian heard the woman's scream, her brain shut down all unnecessary functions and went into automatic mode. She could no longer hear the music in the background, she didn't see the people behind her scurrying to see what was happening, she immediately went on the attack. She hurriedly approached the source of commotion and found Johnny boy, with his arm around some girl's neck, holding a broken bottle to her throat, and crying out for everyone to stay away. The look on the girl's face was hauntingly frightful, a face she'd seen many times before.

She acted. She walked briskly toward him, poised with perfect and shapely timing. She maintained constant eye contact like a panther on the hunt, which seemed to put him in a trance. Her devilish smile silenced his mind long enough for her to strike. She stepped right up to him, gracefully, yet swiftly, grabbed his wrist, the one wielding the bottle, and broke his nose with the palm of her other hand. He dropped like a rock and fell back, while his eyes rolled around in his head, then hit his head hard on the floor. The boy was out cold.

Everything happened so fast, only a few people were witness to such a courageous act. Vivian saw things a little differently. She looked down at the young man, wondering what would cause a person to cowardly hide behind their victim and for a moment, Vivian only saw what the man would look like with a big V slashed into his forehead. When the man fell, he let go of the girl, she ran to her boyfriend, but then stopped to turned around and see the outcome of Vivian's attack. The girl was not disappointed and would rail with excitement as she described Vivian's onward charge at the man to her boyfriend. Kate finally saw what she came to see. Bestowing a sense of righteousness to one's convictions was the cornerstone that was missing in her life, and Vivian's simplicity in justice was a heavenly sword that comforted her.

"You are what legends are made of Vee," Kate stated. "You should embrace that."

"Yeah, I did ok this time, but next time, how far will I go? I don't know how much of that boy's actions where his and how much was fear or alcohol. I've always known the person I put my knife into deserved it, this time was different. I don't want to be a legend."

Kate admitted to Vivian, "Well, that's the kind of stuff I that I had hoped to see when I took this job, thanks for the show."

Vivian looked at Kate, wondering if she wished she could do the things that she's done. "Tell me Kate, what is it you expect out of our relationship?"

Kate was a good fifteen years older than Vivian. Neither had any family left so she formed a bond with Vivian when she gave her the peace and justice for her family she desperately needed. "I was a good DA, I was a good lawyer, I had hopes of becoming a judge and even on the supreme court. My own system failed me; justice is only justice when it is served. I was unaware of how much corruption was acceptable in the justice system."

"What are you doing tonight?" Vivian asked.

“What do you have in mind?” Kate replied.

Vivian told her, “Sounds like you have things to talk about, contrary to appearances, I can be a good listener.”

Kate thought it would be a good time to bring up an idea, “You can make a lot of money doing what you do, I can help you.”

“You’re supposed to be working on things to keep me out of prison, not putting me in there. You’re not sounding a lot like a lawyer right now.”

“You’re right,” she said. “But, knowing the law can be in our favor, we could control the play book.”

“I want to enjoy my life, even after being heartbroken three times, I’d like to try it one more time with Frank. I don’t want to have to worry if my house is surrounded by federal agents acting as mercenaries.”

“I understand your apprehension, I truly do. I’ve lived my entire life by a set of rules that I’ve come to realize was a lie. Not everybody that works hard reaps the rewards of their actions. Sometime undeserving people take that which cannot be returned. I finally got it. I made it a career to prosecute and destroy people’s lives over a set of rules that some people get to ignore. True beliefs aren’t merely written on paper but dwell in the hearts of men.”

“Why are you getting all poetic on me?” Vivian asked.

“I don’t mean to. It’s just that whatever it is, or was, that drove you to seek vengeance, but it’s very telling. Most people know what the right thing to do is but lack the courage to act. You have that courage, like it or not, you are a hero to many. I know you want your personal time, but consider how many lives you have changed, how many you have saved, and how many more needs saving. The world will not stop taking from you until you stop letting it.”

Vivian sat at the end of the bar calmly sipping her drink. She had a set of four crystal tumblers made while in Germany,



they were three quarter size a normal tumbler and perfectly suited for a three-ounce shot of bourbon. She reached behind the bar, grabbed another, and gave it to Ms. Whitman. She then poured some Jim Beam in her glass and mentioned, “I prefer Maker’s Mark, but we haven’t gotten around to addressing that yet. I know what you are asking, and I’d be a liar if I said I hadn’t thought about it. I think about it all the time, as a matter of fact, that’s how I know I have a problem with it.”

“You need time for yourself, I agree, but sooner or later the thing you were born to do, pushes you in one direction. I’m just saying, when that time comes, I’ll be here to help.”

With the assumption that she be getting back involved with her brand of justice someday, they both felt a little liberated. Kate, because she felt closer to where she wanted to be, and Vivian, because she doesn’t feel like she must hide anymore.

Frank walked in and sat next to Vivian at the bar just as a couple people were helping the drunkard to his feet and escorted him off the property. “What’s going on here?” Frank looked around confused.

Vivian told him, “We had a bit of a problem, but it’s all taken care of now.”

Not knowing how close he called it, Frank looked at Kate, smiled, and asked, “Did she save the day again?”

“Yes, she did.”

Frank wasn’t surprised nor was he too concerned, if anyone could hold her own, it would be Vivian. “I have interesting news,” he declared.

“Vivian swiveled around, “Do tell.”

Frank announced, “I got a job offer to fly a camera crew around Maui for a documentary. Two thousand dollars a day plus expenses. Sounds like fun, do you want to ride along?”

“Her mood lightened a lot, “Yeah, you can give me more lessons too.”

“The helicopter’s different than the Cessna, but sure, I’ll give you pointers.”

Kate saw the youthfulness in their contact and wondered for a moment what happened to her. “You kids have a good time, Vee, if you want to talk more, I’m always here.”

“Are you leaving?” Vivian asked.

“Yes, you really do need to have some fun and enjoy life, call me some time, when you’re ready,” and walked away.

Frank was left confused, “What was all that about?”

Vivian told him, “She thought I might need someone to talk to after setting that young fellow straight.” Vivian didn’t want to talk to Frank about the thoughts that haunted her. Talking to Kate was different, more professional, getting personal was hard for Vivian. As much as she wanted to forget her past, the things she’s done, and get on with a new life, she couldn’t escape her desire to make things right. She knew she would struggle to explain it to Frank and kept her discussion with Kate to herself.

Frank let it go and focused back into his world of island adventure. Vivian finished her drink and set the glass on the counter, “When is your tour?”

Frank replied, “Tomorrow afternoon, from one o’clock to four o’clock.”

She gazed seductively into Franks eyes, “Cool, I’ll be ready.”

They left the bar shortly thereafter and spent the rest of the evening relaxing on their sofa.

Meanwhile back in New Orleans, Sasha and Tanya were being used as pawns by Ms. Whitman’s successor, Albert Hummel. The new DA was an ass by anyone’s definition and to illustrate his power over the legal system he became known as the maker of deals. Between him and his prosecutors, they offered and received more plea deals than at any time in the city’s past. His plan was to flush Vivian out by falsely charging Sasha and Tanya as the vigilante killer.

Kate got word of what was happening back home from Sasha's public defender, "Vee, honey, I have some bad news. They just apprehended Sasha and Tanya and are charging them with the murders."

"Those assholes!" Vivian belted out.

"Before you go doing anything rash, let's talk about this." Kate tried hard to persuade her, but she knew Vivian only had one preferred speed.

Vivian calmly said, "He's doing this to flush me out, it worked. But this reunion will be on my terms. What time was the arrest made and what time was the press release?"

Kate instinctively looked down to her watch, "Yeah, there it is, the press release came at the same time."

"We'll give the same newspaper a story. I will target one degenerate and offer him up to the press as evidence that "V" is still on the street proving Sasha and Tanya couldn't be the killers. The public would see that Sasha and Tanya couldn't be guilty as charged."

Kate reminded her, "I thought you wanted me to keep you out of prison. Let me help you stay out of prison, by not taking the bait."

"That's why I need you with me, you think like a chess player. It's totally logical to stay away. It's the smart thing to do, but they, like many before them, made it personal. I know they know I'm coming, but that's not going to help them."

Kate acknowledged, "This isn't the kind of excitement I was hoping to discuss with you. I was thinking more in the lines of specific targets."

"Well, there you go, how fast can you find a convicted felon that most certainly returned to his loathsome lifestyle and should probably face real justice?"

"Yean ok, I like where you're going with this, except, the part that the entire city's police force will be looking for you."

Vivian laughed, “For an educated woman you seem to be missing the simplest of things; how’s this? You find me a target; I make some calls, next thing you know, multiple 911 desperate calls for help flood the system and draw all available resources away from where we want to operate.”

Kate squinted an eye in thought, “That’s interesting and smart, I had a few cases thrown out on technicalities that will definitely qualify.” She paused, “Wait a minute, I got just the guy for you.”

Frank noticed a little something in Vivian, she wasn’t worried, or concerned, she was happy and upbeat, this excitement and planning another operation had Vivian ready to rumble. Frank advised her, “I hope you don’t let your emotions make your decisions for you.”

Vivian responded, “I understand your concern, but I believe that it was Mr. Albert Hummel that made that mistake. Now, let’s see how fast we can get the girls back out into the street.”

The following morning, Frank, Vivian, and Kate flew out to San Diego where they met up with one of Frank’s flying buddies, Scotty Cahill. Scotty had a Turbo-Stationair and flew in from Bakersfield to swap planes with them. Scotty flew Frank’s plane back to Hawaii and house sat for the weekend, while Frank, Vivian, and Kate used Scotty’s plane to continue to New Orleans.

Vivian told Kate on the way across the water, “Thanks for being the girl’s counselor, counselor.”

“Think nothing of it, I consider it a duty, after all, I am on retainer. Bureaucrats will be the death of society, at some point, a line in the sand is formed. We choose sides.”

Vivian laughed and exclaimed, “Finally, someone that understands.”

Once there, Vivian went to work. She pulled out her makeup kit and spent two hours talking to Frank, drinking a little bourbon, and painting a disguise. She became a makeup artist in

her own right. A naturally beautiful woman being made to look average or humdrum just with makeup amazed and amused Frank. By the time she was done, she almost looked like a young man. She slipped into a pair of coveralls, put her hair up under her hat and was ready to go.

They had developed a detailed plan but knew the odds of having to improvise was a much easier bet. Frank was dressing in suit and tie to simply blend into the courthouse atmosphere, Vivian assumed the role of a janitor, complete with an out of order sign, a bucket, and a mop. She waited patiently, hidden in the cleaning closet on the second floor, until Frank sent her a one letter text. “K” That was her signal that Mr. Hummel was headed to the restroom. His prostate dictated much of his bathroom schedule and was known to go quite frequently.

Just after Mr. Hummel entered the men’s room, Vivian placed the ‘out of order’ floor sign at the door’s entrance and wheeled her mop and bucket in behind him. She scanned the room for witnesses and saw some feet in one of the stalls against the far wall. Mr. Hummel standing at the urinal doing his thing. She walked past him and began to mop an area near the last stall. It must have been her lucky day, the man in the first stall flushed and walked out without washing his hands. Mr. Hummel finished and stepped over to the sinks. Vivian stepped up next to him, which startled him, but she didn’t give him any time to recognize the potential threat before she grabbed his shirt high on the collar and twisted it around her hand tightening his collar like a noose. With her other hand, she held her knife tightly against his chest.

With a calm and quiet voice, she told him, “Don’t say a word, I think you know who I am, you arrested those girls to get me out of hiding, it worked.”

He uttered a noise as one might if they were going to start talking and Vivian pressed her razor-sharp knife to his chest just enough to break the skin, “I told you not to say a word.” Then she continued to lecture him, “You had better listen closely you little

fat fuck, I don't have a lot of time. Your perversion of our justice system is over. You'll release those girls today, if you don't, I will kill you. If you trample on people rights again to force a case, I will kill you. The only reason I am not ending your miserable life today is you are supposed to be on our side, the side of justice, not the side of power. If you make me regret not slitting your throat, I will make your end so painfully sad even Charles Manson will feel sorry for you. Do you understand me?"

He nodded.

She loosened her grip on his collar and told him to turn around, she pulled a baggy out of her back pocket that had a rag with chloroform on it and covered his mouth and nose with it until he began to get weak kneed, and she helped him down to the ground preventing further injury.

She left the mop and bucket and walked out of the restroom, down the stairs and out of the building. Frank was two steps in front of her.

"How did it go?" He asked.

"We'll find out by the end of the day. I hope I judged this guy right. He's ambitious and would love to make me a trophy, but I'm counting on him to stay within the law. If he doesn't let Sasha and Tanya go, all bets are off and there will be hell to pay."

By the end of the business day, Sasha and Tanya were still in lock up. "Ok, plan B," Vivian said. She opened the envelop Kate gave her. It contained a name, a photo, and an address of one Richard Sweeney, long time criminal and sex offender. He had recently been arrested for rape but was released due to the victim being a known prostitute, the prosecutor's office didn't want to take a chance losing a case to a conflicted jury. Vivian's blood was getting warmer by the minute. "He had his chance, now I change the direction of his career."

Vivian located her target in a dive bar near his disgustingly decrepit apartment. As soon as she recognized him,

she called the Times-Picayune, “Let me speak with Ms. Langford,” Vivian demanded.

“Please hold, I’ll see if she’s available,” the voice on the other end replied.

Vivian insisted, “She better be, because it is the biggest story of her career and if you let it slip away, she’ll crucify you.”

A voice came on the phone, “This is Amanda Langford, who am I talking too?”

“I’m the center of the District Attorney’s attention, my name is Vee. I presume you’ve heard of me?”

Little goosebumps rose her arm, all at once, Amanda became excited yet fearful. “How can I help you?”

“Funny you should ask,” Vivian responded upbeat. “I have a story if you have the time.”

“Yeah, of course.” She paused and took a breath.

“There’s a bar on Esplanade, The Red Rooster, I’ll give you a five-minute interview in a public place, you have about fifteen minutes to get there. I’ll meet you there. Oh, and don’t worry, you can bring one other person, but no photos.”

“I’m on my way,” she said as she hurried out the door.

Vivian then called Jasmine, who was parked in the back of the bar, hiding in the night. “We’ll be coming out the back in about twenty minutes.”

There were only about six people in the place, and her boy was at the pool table already giving some poor young couple a hard time. Frank stayed near the door to lookout for Vivian and stood, like a bouncer, watching everything from afar. She cozied up to Richard Sweeney and asked him to buy her a drink. He had no idea who she was or what she was doing. She was still dressed and in costume from her trip to the courthouse, so she didn’t have her normal pizzazz, so she had to improvise. She grabbed him on the ass. He didn’t mind that one little bit, and took it as open season.”

He turned and yelled to the bartender, “Bring this girl a Budweiser.” He turned back to Vivian, “What’s your name honey?”

“They call me Vee.”

“Ain’t that pretty.”

Vivian kept him stimulated and within reach. It took Amanda and her associate editor, Karl, twelve minutes to get there. Frank gave Vivian a wave, signaling that the reporter was here so Vivian told Richard, “Look, big guy, if you behave yourself for five minutes while mama talks with her sister, I’ll come back, take you out back, and take care of that problem you have in your pants,” and gave him a wink.

That worked for him, and he spent the next five minutes watching her from across the bar, he wasn’t letting that get away from him.

Vivian waved them over to a table. Vivian’s back, of course, was to the wall. She didn’t get up, she didn’t extend her hand, she simply spoke, “I have very little time, so I hope you have good questions.”

Amanda said, “Let’s start with the basics, why are you doing this?”

Vivian said, “You weren’t too specific there, were you. What I’m doing is cleaning the streets. The system is broken, violent criminals are released to our streets, now we live in fear. No, a society cannot allow itself to live like that. I do what the DA should be doing, but instead, he’d rather focus on me.”

Amanda was almost shocked that she confessed so early within the interview.

“Do you feel bad for the men you’ve killed?”

Vivian smiled, “That’s what I’m talking about, a direct question. No, I do not. Life is precious, but those who prey on the weak and innocent lose their right to enjoy such pleasures as life. I feel bad for their victims. The pain, humiliation, trauma, and loss they have caused demands justice.”



Amanda's last question was, "Are you planning to continue your activism?"

Vivian replied, "Well, what I'm going to do next is prove to you, my identity, and expose the DA as a gestapo leader. He is presently holding two girls in jail unconstitutionally and with malice, claiming that they are in fact me, while knowing they are not. He has no problem violating their rights to get what he wants, by definition, corruption. I want you two to sit in your chairs and watch me walk out the back door. Give it a minute and go out back and report. When you tell this story, make sure you reiterate the DA had his chance and blew it."

Vivian got up and walked back over to the pool table. Frank had been watching and started to head toward the rear of the bar himself. Amanda and Karl sat as they were told. Vivian grabbed Richard's arm and started toward the back door. He had no idea what was coming and by the time he figured it out, it was too late. She pulled him near the wall behind the bar and turned him around. He got the immediate impression she liked it rough and played along. She wasted no time or effort, she ran sweetie through the side of his throat, severing his carotid artery, she then switched hands and plugged him in the chest twice. She pinned a note to his chest and told him, "This is more peaceful than you deserve, au revoir."

Frank followed her out just in time to see the man slump down to his knees. They hurried across the street and got into Jasmine's old taxi. Amanda waited for her prescribed minute and scurried out the back door to see if she was gone. There, she saw Richard Sweeney humped over himself in a pool of blood. A rather large V was sliced into his forehead, and he had a note pinned to his shirt addressed to the press. Amanda, being the press, knew that the note was meant for her and pocketed it. She didn't disclose it to the police right away either. Being in possession of material evidence has its own consequences, even if you're protected by freedom of the press. She will claim the

note was given to her during the interview. The note read like an obituary, claiming every crime he had been convicted of, and a long record of hurting other people. “The DA let this reprobate free after committing rape, while holding two innocent girls in jail. He’s claiming those girls are me, but as you can clearly see, I’m out here doing my thing, keeping the city free of scum.”

Jasmine drove them back to the airport where they wasted no time to get clearance to depart and began their long flight home.

The Times-Picayune ran the story fresh off the Sunday Front Page. “Killer holds interview, then kills!” Within the article, was a transcript of the letter pinned to his shirt, and a lot for the DA to answer for. He started getting calls before the sun even came up. Local news stations gathered outside his home, complete with camera crews and portable broadcasting stations. “Excuse me Mr. Hummel, is it true you purposely locked up the wrong people?” a reporter shouted. Another shouted, “Are you going to let those girls go free?”

One of the news stations turned their camera to Kate, who was staying back to secure the girl’s release. The reporter spoke into the camera, “We’re gathered outside of Albert Hummel, the District Attorney’s house with Kate Whitman, former District Attorney, who now represents Sasha Thibodaux and Tanya LeBlanc, the two girls being held at the jail house. “We’ll be demanding their immediate release as soon as the courthouse opens, and possibly pursuing ethics charges against the district attorney.” The reporters gave her full access and Kate laid it on heavy. The courthouse opened at nine and by five after nine, the girls were walking out the door. Jasmine picked them up and whisked them away before the press could descend upon them. Kate met with them back at the house.

Kate told them, “There’s no doubt that they are going to keep you under observation, so keep everything routine for a

while, I'll keep you informed if anything changes. Here's my card in case you need to get in touch with me."

"Why don't you just stay here?" Tanya asked.

"I have to maintain a strictly business-like relationship if I'm going to be able to represent you, I'll have much more influence over this process. Vivian wanted to come herself, but they're obviously looking for her, so she sends her love."

Sasha said, "When you see that crazy girl again you tell her we love her too."

Jasmine dropped Frank and Vivian off at the hanger and said her goodbyes. Frank's service had the plane fueled and ready to go. They would be stopping again in San Diego where Scotty would be waiting to swap planes again.

## Chapter Seven

Safely home, Frank and Vivian took a couple of days to just sit in the shade on the Cabana's veranda and enjoy each other's company. Vivian could feel herself growing closer and closer to Frank and those feelings scared her. She looked at Frank and a tear formed under her eye, "I miss my Sadie. God damn it, I miss her. I am so angry, yet so scared." She then dropped her head and closed her eyes as if she were sending her a prayer and told Frank, "I'm afraid of hurting you, too. Everyone I get close to gets hurt."

Frank could tell she was in a deep depression and given her apathetical nature toward people she deems unworthy; he knew her pain was genuine. In her fragile state of mind, Frank figured anything could set her off. He gently pulled her close and put his arms around her. Kissed her cheek and whispered, "Vee, it's not your fault, it was Sadie's choice, her desire that put her in the path of that bullet. Fate doesn't pick sides, it's a natural order of events, the best we can do is anticipate the cause and effect."

"Well, I didn't do a very good job, and now my sweetie is gone. I've been hurt plenty in my days, but this is different, it hurts Frank, it really hurts. I feel all alone."

Frank said, "I'm right here for you Vee, you're never alone."

She lifted her head, "Yeah, I know, unless something happens to you, and I have to do this all over again."

Frank had never seen Vivian in such despair and tried, unsuccessfully, to change the subject. Vivian regained her composure, took a sip of her drink, and explained to Frank, "Hummel is not going to stop. I made him a promise, I have to keep it."

"Vee, we got out safe, the girls are out of jail, can't we let it go. It was an arbitrary deadline. Please don't let emotions control you."

She leaned into him and gave him a hug. “Sweetheart, it’s not about his challenge to my demands, it’s because he’s not going to stop. He doesn’t have a family to leverage, he hasn’t been a dirty cop, per say, all he has is his ambitions and the resources to find us. I can’t let that happen. Believe me, I’m thinking clearly. He is an existential threat.”

Frank knew she was right, but he also saw the devil in her eyes. All the empathy she denied the predators of the world, she bestowed upon their victims, and Frank could see her pain was destroying her. “What are you thinking of doing?”

“I’m thinking about asking Kate to set me up with a meeting with the department of homeland security.”

That got Frank’s full and undivided attention. “What? You’re not seriously going to talk with Homeland? Are you?”

Vivian remained assumingly calm while Frank struggled to understand. She told him, “In their system, its bureaucrats making decisions, so within their system, we find a bigger bureaucrat. If we can give Homeland something, they can sink their teeth into, like human trafficking, I believe they’ll let us get away with murder. This wouldn’t be the first time I’ve played the system.”

“Vee, baby, this isn’t a game to be played.”

“Sure, it is,” she replied. “It’s just unfortunate that they are the ones who make the rules. They’re not going to give two shits for a handful of thugs, but having crime decrease in major cities by ten or twenty percent, that’s something they can sink their teeth into. I think my proposal will interest them.”

Frank was all ears, “You’ve surprised me many times, actually, every time, Ok, I’m listening.”

“There’s a movement happening within the city and soon will spread across the country. The movement is real, and DHS can use that to hide within societies affairs. We can share information with them in return for exoneration. Mr. Hummel may be a Nazi, but he is using the system. If we’re going to win,

we must use the system better or change the rules. With crime falling, Homeland can pressure local authorities to stand down from various investigations citing National Security.”

Frank asked, “So, you haven’t talked about this to Kate yet?”

She admitted, “No, but I don’t think there will be a problem with that. Kate knows the system better than anyone I know; I can’t think of a better person to negotiate for me. My biggest and most immediate concern is what to do with that little prick, Hummel.”

They spent the rest of the night together in comforting embrace. Frank was nervous about Vivian’s plans, as well as anyone would be, but knew his life, like hers, was already long past the white picket fence. They felt a little emotionally spent, she leaned closer to Frank, put her head on his shoulder, I’m sorry to get you involved.”

Frank assured her, “I knew what I was doing, we all make our choices, I made mine. Don’t worry about me, while I’m worrying about you, alright?”

The next day, Kate came through and managed to set up a meeting with agent Carlson of the Department Homeland Security. She encouraged Vee, “Vee, listen to me, never, ever, meet with these people without me.”

Vivian nodded, “I know, don’t worry, I would have preferred to have never seen them at all.”

After three long days of waiting, they flew out of Honolulu for San Diego, their first stop on the way to Houston. Vivian finally had to satisfy her curiosity, and asked Frank, “Why do you always used San Diego rather than Los Angeles or San Francisco to fly in and out of?”

He replied, “I think mostly because I was in the Navy, and I flew in a squadron out of Miramar. Our transits to and from Hawaii were always on a carrier out of San Diego. Brings back memories.”

“Ok,” she said. “I thought it may have been because it sucks least out of the three.”

Frank laughed, “Actually, it’s harder landing in San Diego than LAX or SFO because you have to drop in from over the hills.” He thought for a second, then asked, “Do I detect someone that doesn’t like the west coast?”

Vivian laughed, “No, of course not, the west coast is great, hell, I buried Sadie in the Pacific. It’s the cities themselves; too much bad, too much evil, too crowded.”

From San Diego, they flew to Houston and got a room in the Hyatt under the name Andersen, with an e, and waited for Agent Carlson to arrive. Kate and Frank waited inside the room, while Vivian roamed the corridor dressed as housekeeping in case it was a trap. At three thirty, on the dot, Agent Carlson exited the elevator and walked two doors down to the left and knocked on the door. Vivian could see from the end of the hall, that he was alone, so she cautiously made her way back to the room.

She waited thirty seconds from the time he entered, then let herself in. Unsure what to expect, she remained vigilant and walked in with her hand on her knife.

Vivian spoke, “I understand you are not in the position to grant us any requests, correct?” She continued walking closer and stepped to extend her hand, “Vivian Bouvier.” They shook hands and Vivian asked, “Why did you agree to meet me?”

Suddenly Agent Carlson felt his personal power fade under her reversal of inquisition. He was now on the burner to answer her questions. “Ms. Whitman said information you have access to, can help keep entire cities safer. To be perfectly honest, your crusade has created opportunity to clean up a lot of what’s wrong in this country and Homeland is curious and concerned about your actions.”

Vivian had no doubt, they wanted what she had to offer, “Tell your bosses to make me an offer.”

Agent Carlson asked, “An offer for what?”

Kate started to interrupt, to keep Vivian from saying anything she couldn't take back. Vivian looked at her and nodded, signifying that she understands her concerns, "It's ok Kate," she then turned to Agent Carlson, "I want freedom from prosecution, for myself and my associates."

Agent Carlson said, "Call me Bart, as you know, I can't authorize anything, but I have a phone and can call someone that does. What is it you want amnesty for?"

Kate jumped in, "Look here Bart, you are aware of what's happening in the streets of New Orleans of late, are you not. You're what we call a government creep, black ops, deep state shit. We don't trust you, and unless you can deliver on a promise of protection, we're not going to be doing any business, and this meeting is over."

Vivian said, "Well said." Vivian took a seat on a sofa and patted the cushion next to her, inviting Bart to have a seat. "How about taking out your phone, call your boss and let me have a chat with them."

He took his phone out, pressed redial and handed the phone to Vivian. A voice answered, "Brannon."

Vivian spoke, "Who are you?"

"My name is Chuck Brannon, director field office southeast; you didn't hurt my agent, did you?"

Vivian replied, "I hurt his feeling."

"Ms. Bouvier, I'm sorry I couldn't meet you in person, I trust Agent Carlson made you aware that he didn't have authority to negotiate, we wouldn't want you to take it out on him."

"I understand why you sent a rookie, don't worry, I'm not going to hurt him. You know who I am, what I'm accused of, can you or can't you protect us from prosecution?"

"Ms. Bouvier."

She stopped him, "Vee, just Vee." Vivian nodded to Kate, then Kate started recording the conversation.



Mr. Brannon said, “Ok Vee, it really does come down to what you can do for us.”

“Well Mr. Brannon, the type of work I’ve been doing in New Orleans has had outstanding results. I can duplicate that in other cities, and potentially prevent other dangerous criminals from becoming repeat offenders. We can do what you cannot. How does it sound so far?”

He asked, “Who is we?”

“We are the people, as in ‘We the People.’ We are the ones being forsaken by bureaucrats like you.”

“Please Ms. Bouvier,” he began to say.

She stopped him again, “Vee.”

He apologized, “I beg your pardon, Vee, I think we can work something out. We’re not the bad guys, we are all trying to make it a safer place to live, are we not? Let me set you up with a handler, someone that can take care of your needs and be the middleman between us. Officially, we will have never met, or even had this conversation. We cannot go public with support, but behind the scenes, there is plenty we can do to keep the local yokels off your ass. Sound good so far?”

“Yes, exactly, but I have one more little job to do, can I borrow your agent Carlson?”

Brannon asked, “So, you want to use our guy on your op?”

“Yes, I need proof you can deliver on your promise. If your man is part of my operation, you can’t throw me to the system or public so easily. Consider him, undercover.”

Brannon agreed, “He’s been trained, but I suggest you use the handler.”

“It’s not your call Chuck. I like Bart.”

He asked, “What do you plan to do?”

“Darling, I can’t tell you that, that’s the rules.”

Brannon asked her to speak with agent Carlson, “Carlson. You have point, try not to kill anyone, or get killed. I expect to be updated when things happen.”

Brannon ended the call. Carlson handed the phone back to Vivian and told her, “He hung up, but gave the go ahead. Looks like I’m yours for a while. What’s the play?”

Vivian looked at Kate, smiled, then looked back at Bart. “I need you to arrange a meeting with a District Attorney in New Orleans who happens to be a major thorn in my side.”

Meanwhile, Brannon briefed the Director personally, “The youth in New Orleans have become sympathetic and have created tee shirts with a big red V on them in support of her. Any crime happening anywhere will be blamed on this movement. The potential to use her in a very serious and sensitive matter is too hard to give up, she could be the next Lee Harvey Oswald. Kids everywhere idolize her and proudly protest in front of city hall, not for demands of protection from her, but condemnation of the system.”

The director said, “Anarchy never bodes well with voters, looks like our leverage on the hill has increased. Chuck, don’t blow it, the public hates secret societies even more.” Within the department of homeland security, Vivian was given room to work, and she wasted no time planning Mr. Hummel’s demise.

Bart mentioned, “My boss isn’t going to like the fact that you recorded your conversation.”

Vivian laughed, “Yeah, good luck when you tell him.”

He thought for a second, “Not a chance.”

Bart asked, “I thought people from the south were supposed to be hospitable, I’ve been here ten minutes, and nobody’s ask me if I’d like a drink.”

Vivian realized he was right, “I’m sorry, where’s my manners, would you like a drink?”

No sooner than he got a beer in his hand, Frank reminded them they that still had a little airtime left. They flew to New Orleans and got rooms for the night. The next morning, Bart got a call from the handler. “We’re riding blind Bart, do you understand?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Let me speak with Ms. Bouvier.” He handed Vivian his phone again.

“This is Vee,” she said.

Martin had a nice calm soothing baritone voice, she could tell he was in his older years, “Hi, Vee, my name is Martin.”

“Is that a first name or last?”

“Just Martin, it’s my job to help you do your job.”

Vivian had an image in her head of what Martin might look like and asked, “Where are you right now?” Vivian asked.

“I’m around the corner getting a cup of coffee and a Danish. I’ll be there in five, don’t shoot me. Oh, does anyone want donuts?”

Vivian wouldn’t normally even think of donuts, but for a strange reason it reminded her she hadn’t eaten all day. “Yeah, come to think of it can you bring me some of that coffee too?”

Frank told Kate, “With all this phone call stuff, is she exposing everything? Doesn’t the government listen to everything.”

“Sadly, Frank, you’re not wrong. If you’re on anything electronic, you must assume someone else is listening. Vivian is laying all the corruption out on the table, she’s not afraid of the truth, but the system is. She’s basically calling them out.”

Frank said, “This is quite the ride she’s taking us on, isn’t it?”

Kate reflected quietly, “Historic.”

Martin showed up with coffee and donuts and immediately advised them that he didn’t think their hotel was safe enough. “I’m here to get you what you need, keep you out of trouble, and possible risk my life for, the least you can do is listen.”

“Go ahead Martin, we’re listening,” Vivian said.

You’ve chosen protest-central for your headquarters, all around Esplanade people are out in the streets, but they’re not

rioting, it's more like a vigil. Cameras, news crews, police are everywhere, this is not a safe place to be."

Vivian suddenly figured out what she was going to do about Mr. Hummel. "Thanks Martin, you just helped me figure it out. Bart, I want you call Hummel and tell him you have knowledge and where about of the real V. Tell him you'll meet him in secret."

Martin asked, "What are you going to do?"

"It's a guarantee he'll take the bait. We meet in the parking garage of the Superdome tomorrow, no events."

Martin butted in, "There's protests going on down there too."

"I know, that's who's going to do the dirty work. Hummel is a putz, but I'm not wasting a badge on his forehead. Back when he was in the prosecutor's office, he let a child rapist walk out the door with a mere child endangerment charge, that girl later killed herself and was a big story around here. We're going to hand out his photo and involvement, and her photo and story to the mob, and let nature take its course."

All of a sudden, Martin and Bart saw the evil genius in her plan.

The meeting was set for seven P.M. on the fourth parking level. Bart stood next to his vehicle so Hummel would know it was him. After Mr. Hummel parked, Bart waved in over to his vehicle. The plan was to keep him talking until the calvary showed up. At the foot of the dome, near the entrance to the parking garage, Vivian, Frank, and Kate were handing out V tee shirts, along with photos of Mr. Hummel and the girl to a group of kids beginning to congregate. Martin wisely declined to participate, stating that his expertise is in outside sales. They told the kids, who were already donning their tee shirts, "This guy's right up there on level four, I know what V would do, if she were here." Frank watched in amazement how blindly Vivian's sheep

followed. He saw it as psychological warfare, and Vivian was a master.

Within just a couple minutes a group of five young men and women ascended the ramp toward level four. They were all pumped up, clutching a picture of the little girl and Mr. Hummel in one hand, and a fist in their other. Others saw the dedicated five storming up the ramp and assumed something was going down. Not to be left out, another group of kids hurried to the scene. By the time they reached the fourth level, Bart was about out of rhetoric and idle talk when he saw the group coming. Bart immediately recognized his cue to get the hell out. He turned to Mr. Hummel, raised his sidearm, and told him, "Get out."

Mr. Hummel was confused and in shock, he honestly thought he was getting a Watergate moment and important information on his archrival. Bart hollered at him, "Get out."

Albert Hummel stepped out of the car, Bart drove off, and the gang appeared so fast that Mr. Hummel didn't have time to run to his car. Vivian, Frank, and Kate stayed back far enough to instigate but still see what was going on. Vivian stood back and yelled while holding a peace sign, palm out to symbolize V. A new culture was already taking hold of the city, kids saw the peace sign, palm face out as a show unity, and a peace sign showing the back of the hand as a curse to be visited by V. After chanting, 'corrupt pigs let Jenny die,' one of the kids looked deep at the photo and made his own determination that Mr. Hummel had a price to pay for letting a killer out onto the streets and took a knife out of his pocket and attached Mr. Hummel, stabbing multiple times.

As soon as Vivian saw the attack, she told everyone to hurry back down the ramp, but she didn't leave right away. Kate and Frank hurried back down the ramp where Bart was to be waiting to pick them up.

Bart asked them, "Where's Vivian?"

"She'll be down very shortly, she's saying goodbye."

“What?” Bart was nervous.

Vivian walked up and stepped through the crowd to get to the front. The youngsters seemed to recognize her, not by her looks, but more so by her presence. They stepped back and let her through. She bent over Mr. Hummel who was struggling and grasping for air. He looked up into her eyes, realizing who she was increased his fear, but he didn't have enough energy left to respond. Vivian whispered to him, “I told you not to fuck with me.” Then his head fell limp and off to one side as he let out his final breath in passing. Vivian stood up and turned around and calmly walked away. The kids were skeptical, curious, and in awe of her presence. They had never seen her, nor did they know what she looked like, but an eerie acknowledgement that she might be V fed their thirst for righteousness and made their act of violence justified. They stood motionless and watched Vivian walk away. She took off her tee shirt, threw it to a boy that didn't have one, then walked down the ramp. The boys saw her hips sway from left to right calling for their lustful attention, and the girls saw poise and beauty, faithfully stepping toward a metaphorical sunset.

Vivian stepped out of the garage and into the car. They drove off in a hurry. “Well, did you get it?” Bart asked.

“Yeah, we got it,” Kate said. “That was a lesson in mob mentality we should all learn from. Scary, it really is.”

Bart knew he just participated in a felony, but his directions were to not kill or be killed, so he felt safe. “You don't feel bad for that guy?” He asked Vivian.

“No, darling, not in the least. Truth is, I would have preferred to be the one to wield the knife myself, but I'm trying to turn over a new leaf.”

“So, with this operation being complete, I assume I'll be saying goodbye and you'll be dealing with Martin from here on out.”

Kate reminded Bart, “You take care of yourself; the agency will want to protect itself at all costs; don’t be a loose end.” Bart dropped them off at the hotel and drove away. They hurried to get everything together and flew out of town as quickly as they could.

Frank and Vivian flew home to Hawaii, Kate stayed behind to monitor the reaction of the city and specifically the prosecutor’s office. Their flight home was long and arduous. Vivian told Frank, “By now, we have to figure that DHS knows where we are and what we’re doing. We’ll take Kate’s advice and record every communication we have with them.”

“How long do you think we have before they contact us?”

She admitted, “I don’t know, maybe they’ll be patient and wait for us, after all, they’re not the ones under pressure, we are.”

Frank said, “In that case, I say we get back to normal Oahu business and throw a luau this weekend.”

Vivian agreed, “First things first, I want to sleep for twenty hours.”

## Chapter Eight

Vivian had always considered herself a rising sun person, as opposed to a setting sun person, but no one could deny the beauty of a Hawaiian sunset. She stood out on the veranda, looking out over the ocean as the sun touched down on the horizon, and thought of Sadie. Frank could tell she was deep in thought when he approached her. Her mesmerizing stare out over the water told Frank that something wasn't right.

Frank took her hand and asked, "Is everything, ok, Babe?"

"Yeah, I was just thinking about Sadie. I thought I'd have closure by now. I freed her ashes to the wind, but I can't bear to let her go." A tear began to roll down her cheek.

Frank said, "I'm not sure how to make things better, or how long this might last, but I want you to know that I'm here for you."

Vivian said, "Thanks sweetheart, but I'm thinking it's because she still has stuff at the house. Until I clean it out, and box up her stuff, she'll forever be haunting me, and by that, I mean, I'll forever feel the guilt. It makes me so sad."

Frank said, "There you go, that's it. You should take a vacation from this vacation and go back, get with your friends, and party one more time for her. Then pack up all her stuff and store it at your mom's house until you're ready to let it all go."

Vivian noticed his choice of words and asked, "Thanks Frank, that's a good idea but, but you said, 'you should' not 'we should,' were you planning on staying here?"

"Summer's here and we have a full schedule. The business needs me here and your heart needs you in New Orleans. I'll fly you there."

Vivian said, "Don't take this the wrong way, but back when you had your gulfstream, the flight would have been bearable. Eleven or twelve hours in a Cessna is like driving to Atlanta in a rickshaw."



“You could always fly back commercial, go 1<sup>st</sup> class, baby, you deserve it.”

Vivian stated, “You sure seem like you’re trying to get rid of me.”

“Frank insisted, “No baby, if you have too much sadness bottled up inside of you, it could tear you apart. I’ll be fine here for a few days; you really do need to find peace.”

She took a sip of her drink, stood next to him, and leaned her head on his chest. “I’ll think about it, I don’t want to decide tonight, I’ve had too much to drink.”

Frank’s suggestion to go back to New Orleans registered loudly with Vivian. Even though they’d only been back to Hawaii for a couple of days, there was business left undone. She also thought about the mode of travel. She’d taken that eleven-hour flight before and wasn’t looking forward to doing it again. When Vivian woke in the morning, she made her decision, “Darling, I’m going to fly back to New Orleans for about a week, maybe two. Thanks for putting up with me, I think I’ll be ok by the time I get back. You stay out of trouble while I’m gone. Call me right away if anything weird happens. If trouble comes, and I’m not there, it’ll just add to the long list of promises I failed to keep. I don’t know how much more I could take.”

Frank understood she needed it and tried to reassure her that everything would be ok, “Vee, I’ll be fine, you’re the one going back into the fold. Please be careful.”

Her first-class flight from Honolulu to San Francisco on United Airline was one of the better flights she could recall. She sat in an aisle seat near the entrance, so she could be first one off when they landed, but it also enabled anyone in first class to have direct view to her hypnotic gaze if they were to pass through the cabin on their way to the restrooms. Her dress was short, a little shorter than she had realized when she put it on, until a middle-aged man walked back down the aisle to the restroom and locked eyes with Vivian and just for a moment, he glanced down and

caught a glimpse of her bright red panties. She saw his eyes focusing south and realized her fashion error. Now that she had his full undivided attention, she thought she'd play a game with him. Her version of truth or dare. He locked eyes with Vivian, and she slightly raised one eyebrow. He would take that as a gesture of interest and ask her, "Travelling alone?"

She replied, "A rhetorical question is no way to greet someone. I'd say I'm traveling with about three hundred people."

He replied in an embarrassed tone, "I'm sorry, I'm Rick." He raised his hand and slowly waved. "I was just trying to break the ice."

"Call me Vee," she said. Her smile drew him closer into her spell. "To answer your question, I'm never alone."

He found nerve to say, "That's bad news for me."

She pointed a finger at him to scold him, but retained a smile, "No It's good news for Ms. Rick."

He knew that he was busted, "Excuse me," he said as he continued to the restroom.

When he finished, he passed back by Vivian, and she reengaged the conversation. "Excuse me Rick, would care to sit for a moment and have a chat?" She patted the window seat and shifted her fabulous frame around to give him room to get in.

He was a little apprehensive, but this was an exciting moment in his routinely dull life.

Vivian asked him, "So, Rick, where are you heading?"

His replied carried a subtle hint of anguish in it, "St. Louis."

She rattled off another question, "In Hawaii on vacation or business?"

"Business, I'm a finance consultant and travel a lot."

She then asked, "are 'you' travelling alone?"

"Yes." He paused, then asked her, "Why all the rapid questions?"

While she studied his facial expressions, she pondered his response to a blunt and personal question, “Just one more question s’il vous plait,” That was her second most favorite French sayings, if you please. What are your thoughts on cunnilingus at 30,000 feet?”

His face got red fast, “Excuse me?”

“Rick, if you’re going to pretend to be a player, you have to be committed. Can you be so convincing?”

A million thoughts filled his mind at once; he was so confused and embarrassed. He sat straight in his seat and stared at the seat in front of them. What seemed to be a common dream of strange sex with a beautiful woman at nosebleed altitudes, was scary in reality. A man’s sexual and emotional hang ups were easy for Vivian to spot, she has been a pro since her teens. He looked deep into her big brown sexy eyes and was overtaken by her magnificent scent. Many people weren’t aware of the hypnotic and gratifying effect a whiff of a woman’s scent can have, but Rick suddenly became completely aware. His eyes dropped to see her perfectly toned thighs, slowly and slightly open, teasing him with the forbidden fruit.

She whispered to him, “Use the blanket and come to mama, what’s it going to be,” and opened her legs a little bit wider.”

He couldn’t believe he was considering it, but men have done dumber things. Lust took over and the seventeen-year-old Rick came out. He quickly glanced around the dark cabin to see if anyone was watching and decided to go for it. He took the blanket from Vivian and slowly knelt between her knees draping the blanket on her lap. She slid down in her seat a little and got in position. Rick couldn’t believe he was doing what he was doing.

Vivian had her index finger in her teeth. A stewardess stood on the other side of the restroom calmly watching every bit of this awkward exchange. This was one of those situations where she’s supposed to stop this behavior or at least report it. She

couldn't, it was exciting, stimulating, something about the power of Vivian's sexual prowess that made her want to root for her.

Vivian threw her head to the right and noticed the young woman staring at them. She locked eyes with her, tilted her head back a bit, Vivian gave the stewardess a wink and laid her head back in pleasure while Rick did what she meant him to do.

The stewardess didn't tell anyone, probably because she was guilty of enjoying the show. Rick later went back to his seat, and for all practical purposes, pretended nothing happened. The hop from San Francisco to St. Louis was not the normal path home, but the connecting flight to New Orleans was grounded for maintenance and unless she wanted to spend the night in San Francisco, she'd have to do a two-hour layover in St. Louis. The second leg was quiet and lonely, so she had a few drinks. By the time they got to St. Louis she needed a good stretch. Glad to get off the plane and walk around, she headed across the terminal and saw Rick hugging a woman in the middle of the arrival area. Vivian couldn't help herself, opportunities such as this don't come often. She walked gracefully yet swiftly toward Rick and his dear wife, who was there to greet him. She swooped in and planted a big wet kiss on him in front of her, and said, "The truth shall set you free."

"What in God's sake is that all about?"

Vivian walked through the terminal with a smile on her face and a beat in her step, as Rick was left to explain to his wife why a beautiful woman was kissing her man.

Sasha and Tanya met Vivian at the airport in New Orleans when she landed. Sasha was concerned and questioned why Vivian would be coming back so soon? "Baby, what's going on?"

"It's Sadie again. Her stuff is still here, I need to box it up and take it out of the house. I am going to store it at my mom's house for safe keeping, along with Maw Maw's chest of clothes."

After a quiet night of reflection, she woke and gathered all of Sadie's clothes, shoes, jewelry, her manuscript, notes, and

photos for her book. She took it to her mom's house and put it all in the chest with her grandmother's clothes. She shut and locked the lid. As soon as the top of the chest closed, Vivian felt a slight sense of peace. She looked at the chest, knowing she could always come back here and visit Sadie, and she didn't have to carry her around with her anymore. It was a sad relief, but one she desperately needed. Ms. Baxter was in the kitchen clipping articles from the newspaper and listening to some blues on the radio. Vivian walked into the kitchen, "What' cha doing?"

She caught her mom by surprise and Ms. Baxter quickly swept the article up and put it her house dress, "Just doing some scrapbooking, sweetheart. Everyone needs a hobby."

Vivian didn't think too much about it, she saw her mom as a little flighty, but not mentally ill. She let her have her hobby without further questions and asked if she wanted to go out for breakfast. "Mom, we haven't done anything together since you helped me with my acting. Why don't we go out and get some hash browns and eggs?"

Ms. Baxter knew, but never let on that she knew, Vivian wasn't in a play. "Honey, I can cook us up some breakfast, it'll be like the old days."

"Sure, I just didn't want you to put yourself out, I was hoping you'd let me help you out more." She looked around the kitchen and out to the living room, "Where's dad?"

Ms. Baxter said, "They called him in for a double shift at the yard."

"Mom, if you let me help you more, dad wouldn't have to work, he could retire. I have the money."

"I know sweetheart. I have everything in life I need or want except happiness for you. You have been through so much my heart is breaking and the only thing I can offer is my open arms, you shouldn't feel so responsible for others. Henry and I will be fine. Besides, how am I to get any peace if he's always hanging around the house?"

Vivian asked, “Is it too late to teach me to cook?”

Ms. Baxter laughed, “You’re not serious about that boy you’re dragging around, are you?”

“Frank is wonderful, but I don’t see getting that close to anyone again for a long time.”

Ms. Baxter felt Vivian’s pain and changed the subject back to breakfast. They had a nice morning together before Vivian admitted she couldn’t stay. With Sadie safely stowed away, Vivian felt ready to try and move on. She spent the remainder of the week hanging out with Sasha and Tanya. They visited the bar once, but the enthusiasm for wild and crazy partying wasn’t there. Vivian hung around the house and helped Tanya educate Gracie about life on the streets. She also took the opportunity to boast about her encounter with Rick at 30,000 feet. That gave everyone a big laugh.

Gracie looked at Vivian as a sexual goddess. “You got a stranger on a plane to go down on you in public? How the hell does someone do that, that’s fricking awesome.”

Vivian replied, “Sweetheart, that’s nothing, it’s in most men’s nature to want to please women. You’d be surprised what you can get them to do, but you must be careful, it’s also in some men’s nature to take what they want, including sex. No sooner than she finished that statement, her phone rang.

“Hello,” Vivian answered.

“It’s Martin, can we talk?”

“Yeah, go ahead,” she said.

He told her, “I’m outside the house, in the black Crown Vic, across the street.”

Vivian asked him, “Why not come in the house like a normal person?”

“Vee, we have an agreement, but not everyone shares in our decision to work together. You need to assume people are watching and listening, it’s safer out here.”

She told him, “Stay right there, I have to call my lawyer, she wants to be part of the conversation. She’ll be here shortly.” Then she called Kate. “Kate honey, are you ready for a little work?”

Kate replied, “Yeah, Vee, what do you have in mind?”

Vivian told her, “I got an agent outside my house that wants to talk to me about a job. Can you come by?”

“I’m on my way.”

It was a short wait before Kate arrived. She saw Martin sitting in his car across the street, so she walked up and knocked on his passenger window. Martin glanced over and saw Kate standing there. He unlocked the door and Kate slid into the front seat. She addressed herself, “Kate Whitman, Vee’s attorney.” Kate then gave Vivian a call, “I’m outside sitting with your man, come on out.”

Vivian came out of the house, crossed the street, and got in the back seat. “Why am I out in a car instead of my comfy home?”

Martin apologized and told her, “The department has an assignment, if you’re ready, or willing.”

“That doesn’t tell me why I’m outside.”

He said, “Take it from a spook, assume someone is listening everywhere you go. I know without a doubt, there are no listening devices in my car, I wouldn’t count on your house.”

Kate smiled inwardly, mentally mocking his ridiculous statement that his car was safe, knowing that their conversation was being recorded on the phone in her blazer pocket.

He started to hand Vivian an envelope, but she stopped him. “Give it Kate.”

Kate opened it and pulled out the contents. Inside was a photo of a man and a photo of an old beat-up Ford Econoline van. On the back of the picture of the van, was a handwritten time, 5:45 P.M. On the back of the man’s photo was the address to a Home Depot in Beaumont, Texas. Martin picked up the man’s

photo and said, “This is Javier Garcia, he is going to be dropping off a half dozen young girls that the cartel is selling into slave prostitution.”

Vivian angrily mumbled, “How the hell does this happen?” Vivian knew what her buttons were, and this was one of them. More so, she knew the government knew that too. She knew they were exploiting her, but after careful consideration determined she was ok with that, believing even a pawn can do a lot of damage.

Martin started the conversation with, “The cayotes separate families sneaking into the states. They tell them they have better chances of getting across, but of course, they don’t. Sex trafficking is real, and it’s never been worse.”

Kate said, “Hold it Vee, this is where I take over the negotiations.” She then asked, Martin, “Just what is it you want my client to do?” She made the statement boldly and clearly.

“We just want her to keep doing her thing, make it bold. The sensationalism she provides is the only thing that has moved the needle with the press and fired up the public.”

Vivian was a little frustrated at this point, “First, you make me come outside, now while in your company, you refer to me as she. Hello, I’m in the seat behind you. I’m not feeling the love, Marty.”

Martin sincerely said, “I’m sorry Vee. Thousands of girls go missing very year and it barely looks like we’re making a dent. Stopping these traffickers will hit the news and giving credit to the FBI and Homeland Security will give us more bargaining power on the hill to fund future operations.”

Vivian said, “Yeah, it’s all about feeding the bureaucracy, ain’t it?”

Martin snapped back, “It’s about stopping these heinous crimes.”

“I don’t get it. If you know where they’re going to be, why not do it yourself?”



Martin took one of the photos of Javier and looked at it in disgust, “We had this prick, dead to right, last year in a similar op. As soon as he made us, he turned and opened fire shooting all six, killing four as cover for his escaped. He recently resurfaced. We can’t have another massacre like that, the press would eat us alive. This is definitely one of those situations where your talents are invaluable.”

Kate laughed, “How convenient and gracious for you to let my client take the fall. Without total and complete exoneration, we’re not talking anymore.”

He told them, “Vee would be under the same protection as any of us at the bureau.”

Kate asked, “So what is it you want Vee to do?”

Martin looked in the mirror at Vivian and was met by Vivian’s hypnotic stare. He spoke to the mirror, “We have a lot of confidence in you. We’ll be nearby to rush in and secure the kids, and apprehend the people doing the buying, we just need you to take out the bad guy, preferably with extreme prejudice.”

“Thank you for your frankness, when do you need an answer?”

With a straight face, he said, “Take all the time you need, I don’t have to give my boss a heads up for another half hour.”

Vivian said, “Half hour? Martin, we’re going to have to talk about this communications problem you have.”

“We have an undercover rookie standing by, but believe me, she couldn’t hold a candle to you, and we wouldn’t have the vigilante stigma to exploit.”

Kate acknowledged, “Bullshit, you can pretend you’re the vigilante yourself.” Kate handed the photos to Vivian. Vivian looked at them and thought about the children, she thought about the feds using her as an assassin, and determined, she was ok with that. “Of course, I’m going to do it, but you better understand, I’m doing it for the kids.”

Martin said, “Great, I’ll make the call.”

Vivian stopped him, “Hold on, Marty, I’m going to need something in return.”

He said, “Alright, what do you need?”

“I want a first-class ticket out of Houston, back to Hawaii as soon as it’s over, and I want you to pay my attorney fees, let’s say, two hundred thousand dollars, to be paid to Ms. Whitman, in cash.”

Kate said, “Vee, I don’t need money.”

“Nonsense,” she said. “This is your profession; you need to make a living.”

“Ok then, how about three hundred K?”

Vivian joined back in, “Or four hundred?”

“Hold on,” Martin insisted. “Before you get to a billion dollars, I can authorize your two hundred thousand and your identity will be redacted and kept secret.”

Vivian scoffed, “Don’t mess with me Marty.”

Martin was smart enough to be afraid in that regard, “Don’t worry Vee, your identity is safe, you will be protected.”

Of course, Vivian didn’t trust him, and asked, “How did you know where I was?”

“Vee, we have a lot of resources, can we leave it at that?”

“One last thing, Marty, you said not everyone shared in your plan to use me, how many people know what we’re doing, and how many disapprove?”

“Nobody knows specifically that you’re involved, but some at the bureau are getting tired of being stonewalled, and having their evidence and reports being buried and sealed. There’s only so much secrecy these assholes will put up with.”

Vivian replied, “Well, I hope you never put me in the position that I have to defend myself against you, or the FBI, because it will piss me off and I don’t play fair.”

“I’m on your side Vee, and if you don’t mind, please stop calling me Marty.”

She smiled, “Sure.”

They provided her a Lincoln Continental and she told Martin, “Thanks for not putting me in one of these cop mobiles.”

“Only politicians get Mercedes and Beamers,” Martin said laughing, “Our tax dollars hard at work, right?”

Vivian took the keys from him. “What time do you want me to be at the Home Depot?”

He told her, “We’ll show up around four thirty and wait. We’ll parked around the perimeter watching everything coming in.”

Vivian questioned him, “You should have a pair of eyes out there right now. If we’re willing to wait an hour, what’s to say, they’re not willing to wait two? I may not be as technical as you boys, but I don’t get fooled often.”

“I’ll pass that up the chain. You take care of yourself; I’ll see you in Beaumont.”

Vivian wasn’t sure why, but she kind of liked Martin. He was different, nonjudgmental but still a smart ass, he wasn’t without a sense of humor. Sarcastic yet sincere, he was the kind of guy that can call his friend a dumbass and make it sound endearing.

She told him, “Thanks for the ride.” She then stared into his eyes, which captured a moment in his time. He stared back, and for just that moment, he felt her in his mind, pulling emotion from deep within him. He felt her hypnotic presence, broke his gaze, and humbly bid his farewell.

She later drove across Louisiana to Beaumont and parked near the entrance of the Home Depot. The feds had drones, traffic cams, agents at the highway on and off ramps, and satellites, they were confident, nothing was getting through. Martin wasn’t in charge of the op, but he was Vivian’s one and only contact. The entire time they engaged her, she had reason to be weary. She’s seen plenty of corruption in law enforcement and the courts firsthand. Vivian put in her ear bud and established

communication with Martin. He in turn replied, "I'm here, I see you by the sign."

"Who else is here?" she asked.

"About a dozen eggs and one sausage," referring to his German heritage.

Vivian signed with sarcasm, "Funny.

"We're everywhere, Vee, it'll be alright."

"I'm not worried about Javier; he is the enemy I can see. I'm worried about the one I can't. You have got a dozen agents, any of which could easily collect a bounty, if so inclined. I really don't like having to watch my back. Do me a favor and keep them far away from me."

"Ok, Vee." Martin told her, "I have communications with you, I also have communications with the team, but you and the team do not have communications with each other. It causes too much confusion, if you don't hear it from me, it's not real."

Vivian insisted, "Just keep your guys off my ass."

"Play nice, Vee. We're all on the same side."

"Sorry Martin, I play the way I feel and sometimes I feel dangerous."

They chatted a while to keep each other company and bide their time. Vivian learned a lot about him. He had a wife of thirty-seven years, two grown daughters and four grandchildren. This was to be his last field assignment.

At 5:40, the van showed up just as expected. The entire team kept their eyes on it as it drove through the parking lot, but all they could see was Javier in the driver's seat. He drove through the parking lot to the back of the middle section. Vivian watched him drive pass, then watched him purposefully settle into two parking spaces. She was parked about ten spaces away and sitting low in her seat. She turned off her car and waited.

She saw Javier sitting in the driver's seat through her passenger window. Watching him sit there unsuspectingly was an inner joy for Vivian. It made her feel like a lioness on a hunt. She

easily worked herself up into a frenzy and told Martin, "I'm ready."

They didn't have any information on what the receiving vehicle was going to be, they would have to stay alert and be ready for anything. Martin got the word of a suspicious vehicle at the north entrance. They watched a little minibus, with Rapture Ministries stenciled on the side, enter the parking lot. It drove in slowly and headed straight for the van. That's when Martin gave Vivian the go. While the minibus was backing into position next to the van, Vivian stealthily weaved in between cars to sneak up on them. Both of their doors would open toward each other and provide a quick exchange.

Vivian knew this was where seconds mattered. She stepped from back of the minibus and noticed a man at the sliding door of the van, passing children from the van to the bus. A woman standing at the bus's door would grab each one and put them on the bus. The handler grabbed the next child, pulled her out of the van, and passed her off the minibus.

Vivian quickly assessed the scene and determined that there were two men, one of them being Javier, in the van and a man and woman in the bus. She was extremely quiet as she approached, and just as the last child was in the bus, Vivian was seen by the woman and had to act. The man turned to see what the woman was warning him of and saw Vivian face to face for a second. Just long enough to understand what he was seeing, but not long enough to react. She thrust her knife into his chest and pierced his heart. Javier saw the incident in real time in the mirror. Immediately after dropping the man, she advanced to the driver's door. By now, Javier had his 9 mm Glock in his hand and was stretching out the driver's window to take a shot. Vivian quickly, and without hesitation, grabbed the gun with her left hand, forcing it away from her. The gun went off, hitting the minibus woman in the face, just below her left eye. The blast to her face took out her lower jaw on the right side of her face. At best, she'll appear

hideously deformed. Vivian then took her knife and sliced Javier's wrist, cutting him down to the bone.

He lost control of his hand and Vivian took the gun away. She removed the clip and chambered the round then threw the gun back into the van. The man driving the minibus had mere seconds to decide what he was going to do and decided to make a break for it. Javier's gunshot signaled Martin's team to immediately respond and prevented the bus from leaving.

Vivian moved in on Javier. Not worried about the handler, or the woman, or the driver making a break for it, she grabbed Javier by his hair with her left hand. Javier's right wrist was bleeding profusely, he tried clutching it tight to his side to stop the bleeding. With her knife pointed at his face, her hand firmly holding his head still, he stared into her eyes and thought he saw the devil. She looked at him and saw anyone of a hundred faces she might have seen on any given day, nothing special, no distinguishing marks, he could have been hiding in plain sight, he could have been someone's boyfriend. Vivian jerked his head backward and said, "Ola." Then rammed her knife deep into his skull through his left eye socket. His screams were deafening. She ended Javier's evil life and as she watched his lights go out, she felt relief. Then she left her mark in a most gruesome way. She held his head down below the dash, so the children couldn't see what she was going on, and carved a V in his forehead, deep with multiple slashes, then slit his throat for good measure. She looked down at him, wiped off her knife on his shirt, and backed out of the window. She saw the kids were safe, the driver of the minibus in custody and decided her job was done. She walked past Martin on the way to her car and gave him her ear bud. "I'll leave your car at the airport. I'm sure you can find it."

Martin was in what he would later describe as an awesome shock. He's heard the rumors, read the reports, studied the case files, but until now, he couldn't comprehend her hunting prowess. In a matter of twelve seconds, two perps lay dead, one painfully

disfigured, and one in custody, all the children were safe, and Vivian got out clean. All of a sudden, her being an asset, took on a whole new meaning. He called to her, “Take care of yourself, Vee. Keep in touch.”

She knew that he meant they would keep in touch with her. She drove all the way to Houston feeling a sense of righteousness for removing scum like Javier Garcia from society but felt dirty for doing it for the feds.

Her flight into Honolulu landed in the middle of the night, and found Frank asleep, in an uncomfortable position at the receiving terminal. She stepped off the plane, happy to stretch her legs, and saw Frank’s sleepy face standing out in the open. For a moment she felt loved, someone cared enough to be there for her arrival. She had a sense that she was finally home.

“How was your trip?” he said after giving her a big hug.

She wanted to tell him all about it, except for Rick, but not at the airport. “How about we talk over some coffee at home.”

“Sure.” They walked out to his car and drove off.

Back in Beaumont, the local paper printed an article describing how the FBI tracked down a sex trafficking ring and rescued six children. It went on to claim that three of the four were wounded or killed at the scene, when the traffickers opened fire.

Vivian caught a glimpse of the story on the news depicting the agents involved as heroes, she had to laugh. It didn’t bother her so much that they were taking credit, which was part of the deal, she was concerned about the corruptive power she may be providing to the system. If they could negotiate with me for an assassination, who could they go after with more money?

She talked to Frank about closing the chapter on Sadie’s belongings and admitted that she felt more at peace. She also told him all about Javier in all its gory details. “I honestly don’t know how people like that live with themselves. Are we animals hunting each other? What could have happened to our sense of decency, that we would allow people to hurt others without

remorse or regret? And, before you go drawing comparisons to my actions, keep in mind, I don't prey on the innocent."

Frank smiled, "No, there's no comparison, I know what you mean. Some people are just evil, Vee. Everyone sees it, some just don't want to admit it." He then let her talk about herself, her pain, her desires. He hoped listening would offer her relief, and that would require practice. The night ended with them dozing off on the sofa in each other's arms.



## Chapter Nine

Vivian and Frank enjoyed the next few summer evenings on the beach and an unexpected change in Vivian occurred. She started drinking beer and shied away from bourbon. Frank drank beer, so it made sense to her, to try to experience what he may be experiencing. As it turned out, she developed a taste for it quickly. The difference between the two was, bourbon made her emotionally numb or on fire, not too much in between. Beer let her feel the middle. Frank was intelligent and handsome, he also adored her, and she just lost her best friend and lover. The beer lowered her defenses and once again, Vivian could feel the butterflies stir inside of her again. She laughed more in three days than she had all year.

While things were heating up for Vivian and Frank, new developments were coming to light back home. Randall Wade was an investigative reporter that had been following Vanessa Wakefield since the Castle Rouge fire. He lost track of her when she fled the states to Europe, but now that she's back, his obsession to get her story returned. As a reporter for the Sun Herald, during that time of *The Harem*, he spent hundreds of hours researching Vivian and all the cases surrounding Castle Rouge. When they began to censor all the information, and everything was being swept under the rug, his position with the paper changed. Randall was a believer in the fundamentals of journalism, and refused to back off the investigation, which in turn got him fired. After that, he went to work for *The Times-Picayune* in New Orleans, where he secretly continued his research on Vivian.

Ms. Baxter received a knock at her door, just before dinner. Randall addressed himself as a researcher for a college yearbook company. He was very polite and friendly, Ms. Baxter hadn't talked with anyone in three days, not even her husband, so she welcomed his conversation. He seemed so interested and

enthused about her, it gave her the feeling that they must have been close friends. Randall had her fooled.

Randall told her, “Right after graduation we were supposed to get together for high honor’s statements. We were to write our most memorable time together in each other’s yearbooks, but she left and disappeared before we could get together.

Ms. Baxter said, “She did disappear, she got a good job at a casino in Mississippi.”

“Yes ma’am, but then she disappeared from there too.” Randall realized he shouldn’t have said it that way.

Ms. Baxter was going through her scrapbook when Randall knocked on the door and left it open on end table of the sofa. She had forgotten all about it after meeting Randall and when they took their seats in the living room, Randall saw the open pages with newspaper articles of the slasher pasted on them. She noticed that he noticed and took the book away. “It’s a hobby.”

They continued talking about Vivian. Ms. Baxter only referenced her by Vee, and he referred to her as Vanessa. She was wise to him, if he really knew her, he would have called her Vivian, even though Vivian’s been using a false ID for years. Ms. Baxter never let Vivian know that she knew. “You’re not with a yearbook company, are you?”

At that point, he either had to lie or tell the truth. “No, ma’am I’m a reporter, I’ve been following your daughter for years, she’s a legend and I want to help get her story out, not their story about her out. She’s in trouble, I’m just trying to help.”

“That’s why you lied to me, so I could trust you?”

“I’m sorry ma’am, I had to know if I was in the right place, and thought if you knew I was reporter, wouldn’t talk to me.” He must have done a good job convincing her that he genuinely wanted to help her, because she continued to talk with him.

“That’s my scrapbook, do you want to see something of hers?”

Randall obviously said, “Sure.” She walked to the far wall and opened Vivian’s grandmother’s chest. Underneath the top sweater lay a stack of photographs that Sadie had taken. There must have been fifty in all, all of Vivian and a few selfies with Sadie.

Randall looked through the photos and understood Sadie’s admiration and infatuation with Vivian. He could see it in himself too. Every photo she was smiling, happy, beautiful, and full of life. Randall couldn’t believe this is the same woman that could look someone in their eyes and cut their throat without flinching.

Ms. Baxter told him about Sadie’s manuscript or notes as a testament to her love for Vivian, wouldn’t show him, nor did she show him the baggy of sims chips and memory cards filled with audio and video files of her dealings with the government. Vivian stashed them deep under her grandmother’s clothes the last time she was here and didn’t think too much about her mom going through her stuff, or whether she would understand it if she did. The lock to the chest wasn’t sophisticated, but Vivian was relatively sure her mom wouldn’t break or pick the lock to get in. She didn’t have to; she’s had a spare key since Vivian moved in. Her scrap book goes all the way back to the beginning. Ms. Baxter had always known of Vivian’s escapades and documented it all in her scrapbook. She also read Sadie’s notes, diary entries, and manuscript, she had even considered finishing Sadie’s story herself and giving it to Vivian as a birthday or Christmas gift.

Ms. Baxter began to think that she’d talked long enough. She told Randall, “Well, young man, I think we’ve said enough for one day. If you leave me your number, I’ll give it to Vee.” She held her hand out toward the door to usher him out.

He left knowing that he had the right girl, and there was a treasure trove of information in that trunk, which he desperately

wanted. He left her with one of his business cards then went to a nearby bar to celebrate.

Ms. Baxter thought about Randall and what it meant that someone knew her identity, then the seriousness of the matter hit her. She called Vivian right away. It was four in the morning in Hawaii, and the call went to voicemail after Vivian failed to answer. She left her a message, “A reporter by the name of Randall Wade, with The Times-Picayune, came around asking about you. He said you were in trouble, and he wanted to help, he left his number.” She gave her the number and closed with a warning, “Be careful honey, he talks nice, but I don’t trust him.”

Meanwhile, Randall was sitting in a bar ten miles away, throwing down a few beers. He thought about how he could get access to the trove of evidence Ms. Baxter had locked away.

Vivian received her mom’s message and called Randall’s number. He answered his phone in the loud, underclass bar. The music was loud and the patrons louder. “Hello,” he shouted into the phone.

“My mom gave me your number,” she said. “What’s your story?”

He replied while walking toward the exit, “Can you hold on for a sec, it’s too loud in here.” He stepped outside, “Ok, I can hear you now.”

“What’s your story? The short version.”

“You are,” he said. “I’ve been following you since The Harem.”

Vivian asked, “You’re cop?”

He replied, “Heavens no, a reporter.” Randall explained, “History will be written from their point of view, unless you can record the real history. I can help you record it.”

Vivian asked him, “How did you find my mother?”

“Someone in the FBI leaked Sasha and Tanya’s Juvie records to the district attorney. Within that, was your Juvie record.

It indicated MS. Baxter as your guardian. If I can find her, you must believe, they already know. I'm just trying to help."

Vivian told him, "No, mister Wade, I believe you're looking for a Pulitzer Prize, but don't be ashamed, if it means you'll do your best, I might be interested in what you can offer. If you're willing to fly out here, I'll fly you back first class."

He didn't have to think about it, of course he was going to follow his obsession. "Yeah, I'll meet you. Where and when?"

Vivian replied, "This coming Saturday, I'll pick you up at the Honolulu International Airport at 7:45 p.m."

"Honolulu?" He wasn't expecting to travel across the globe to see her. "Ok, I'll see you there." Randall couldn't believe his luck, and simultaneously experienced a deep fear, buried in his psyche, that rage could cause him to do what Vivian does so naturally.

Randall arrived in Honolulu on schedule, and he couldn't help but to spot Vivian in the crowd of people gathered at arrivals. She wore a bright red dress and dyed her hair black. Everyone around her looked gray in comparison.

Vivian scanned all the faces coming off the plane and when she locked eyes on Randall, she knew it was him. He knew what Vivian looked like, but she didn't know him from Adam, she relied on her ability to observe and deduce. She spotted his stare and hooked him with her returning stare. He glared at the face in his dreams and had to remind himself it was real. Frank was with Vivian, but he rented no space in Randall's mind. Vivian, on the other hand, held the mortgage."

He walked right to her and put out his hand, "Ms. Wakefield, or should I say Ms. Bouvier? My name is Randall Wade."

She shook his hand and noticed it wasn't as soft as a she expected a journalist's hand would be. "Call me Vee. Before I take you to my home, as a guest, I want you to understand that your honesty must be absolute, it draws a direct line between right

and wrong and I am unforgiving when being wronged. If you've done your research, you would have to agree."

He understood the threat, "I understand your apprehension, but I've seen so much more of your case studies than what they show the public. I know that all of your 'victims' were career criminals with long histories of violence and abuse. They don't want that information out there because the people would support you."

The ride to the bungalows was much longer than it seemed to Randall, his excitement being near Vivian kept his motor running full speed all the way to the beach. They sat on the patio of the cabana, under the early evening sky. Frank brought a handful of beers to the table and sat next to Vivian.

"So, Randall, why are you obsessed with me?" Vivian asked.

"You're a great story. People love you, and they fear you, some want to be you, and others appreciate you doing what they cannot."

Something told Vivian to follow Sadie's wishes. She took a big slug of beer, stood up, and walked to the edge of the patio looking out over the ocean. "Come over here Randall," she waved him over. "You see this perfect sunset. Are you expecting to give this up so you can make a name for yourself?"

He swore, "Not at all. It doesn't get published unless you approve. I'll change all the names and all the places, it'll be a 'based on a true story' novel, rather than a biography. This is your story, I'm just the scribe to put it to paper. I don't want to write this for me, I want to write it for you."

Vivian looked over to Frank, "What do you think Frank?"

Frank was a pragmatic man and agreed with Randall. "Vee, they're going to write stories about you anyway, this may be an opportunity to save grace. I don't think this guy would put himself in danger by coming here with dishonorable intentions. He obviously knows who you are, now he knows where you are."

Vivian asked Frank jokingly, “Or we can just make him disappear.”

Randall’s eyes got huge.

“I’m just kidding.” Vivian laughed. “I’m sorry, I couldn’t help myself, got to maintain a sense of humor in this crazy world.”

Randall was visibly shaken, Frank was laughing, she then told him, “You should have seen your eyes.” She laughed some more. “Alright,” she conceded to his proposal, “I’ll call my mom and have her show you everything I have. It’s in a truck at my mom’s house.”

Randall admitted, “Yeah, I know.”

“How do you know?”

“I’ve seen your mom’s scrapbook.”

Vivian was curious, “What scrapbook?”

Randall wasn’t aware that Vivian didn’t know her mom kept a scrapbook but became very aware that he was now on the hook to maintain honesty. “She has a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, of your exploits.”

Vivian was shocked. She tilted her head to one side and looked at Frank, then back to Randall. “What did you gather from her reactions?”

Randall saw a lost child in her eyes when she asked that question. It gave him the impression that Vivian had an estranged relationship with her mom and didn’t know how she felt. “Vee, she is immensely proud of you. She handled her scrapbook like a valuable possession.”

Vivian’s mind was blown. She assumed her mom was simple and somewhat incognizant, perhaps touched by dementia. Knowing her mom knew who she was, and all she’d done, and still stuck by her, made Vivian feel loved again.

“We’re going to have a couple rules and I don’t mean guidelines. One, Sadie is seen as an angel. Second, my mom keeps all of her collectables. Third, the names and locations of

my family and friends remain protected, and finally, it doesn't get published until I approve it, or I die, whichever comes first. Do you agree with these terms?"

Randall eagerly said, "Sure." He wasn't going to pass this up, she was his golden ticket.

Frank nodded his head in approval and Vivian said, "That settles it," they shook hands. "Your return flight is Monday, looks like you got a two-day vacation in Hawaii, enjoy life while you can Randall, life is short. When you get back to New Orleans, check in on my mom, I'll let her know you're coming." She then tilted her beer back and signaled Leilani's niece, Ocean, to turn the music up. Vivian loved that name, 'Ocean,' it sounded so free. The music lifted her spirits and raised her out of her seat. She stood in front of Frank swaying her hips back and forth, her arms joined in, and soon her rhythm had Frank swaying in time. Frank stared into Vivian's eyes and Randall witnessed her hypnotic power firsthand. Frank and Vivian slowly, and romantically, danced on the patio, which got Randall's excitement level up. He noticed Ocean leaning over the juke box and stared at her figure and mentally undressed her.

Vivian noticed him looking at Ocean and her instinct quickly broke her swan dance. She casually walked over and told him, "Tread lightly Randy, without Leilani's blessing, Ocean is nothing but trouble for you, and don't forget about my desire to stop people from hurting women."

Randall got the message loud and clear and did his best to ignore Ocean.

Vivian returned to her table. She wondered how long her Mom's might have known and what she thought about it. She wanted to know whether her double life had caused her mom grief or disappointment. Even though she didn't feel remorse, or empathy, for the people she had killed, she knew what people's reactions were supposed to be and feared her mother would reject her. She told Frank, "I never talked about this to my mom at all.



I told her I was an actor in a play, and she believed me, so I thought. How long has she known?"

Frank asked, "She never asked you about it?"

"No," she responded.

He continued, "Parents don't usually collect bad reports and failures, of their children, in a scrapbook, so your mom is obviously proud of you, perhaps she has dark side. Maybe she's living vicariously through you."

She thought about that for a moment then looked at Randall. "Is that the impression you got?"

He said, "She was secretive about you, but she was definitely proud."

Vivian finished her beer and sighed in relief. "This is a little confusing for me. I don't feel shame, but it bothers me that my mom would. Does that make sense?"

Frank recommended, "You should probably talk to her."

"Yeah, you're right, I'll call her tomorrow, its two in the morning there now."

Vivian then excused herself and walked over to the juke box where Ocean was looking but couldn't decide on a song. Ocean was seventeen and had pheromones oozing from her. Vivian could feel her presence like a cat in heat. Vivian told her, "Be careful baby."

Ocean asked, "Be careful of what, Vee?"

Vivian responded, "Men can tell when you're having those warm feelings between your legs, and some become blind with lust." She then noticed one of her all-time favorite songs, A Wonderful Life, by Louis Armstrong. "Oh, I got play this, do have a quarter?"

She gave Vivian a quarter and wondered, if Vivian could sense her frustration, could everyone? She asked her, "Vee, why would you think I was horny?"

"My guess is that you've sized up everyone in the bar, and already know who you might want to go to the next level with."

Ocean hasn't had this type of conversation with her mother or even her sisters and having this conversation with her aunt Leilani was out of the question. "You're not going say anything to Leilani, are you?"

Vivian replied with a whispered laugh, "No, baby, you be you, I just want you to be careful." The music started and Vivian went back to resume her dance with Frank. She whispered in Frank's ear, "I'd like to experience a little alone time with you, let's call it a night."

Frank couldn't have timed it any better; his blood flow had already been redirected to the nether regions. Frank and Vivian left the cabana, leaving Randall and Ocean sexually frustrated, though Vivian would not be denied.

Days passed till Randall teamed up with Ms. Baxter. He had everything he needed to write the story of his career and at this point, he slowed down, careful not to miss a point. Kate on the other hand, sped up her involvement. She was busy establishing a 501c3 nonprofit to use her home as a shelter for wayward and abused children. She has also been studying court cases where the legal system failed and found a handful of interest. She called Vivian to discuss her options. "Vee, it's Kate. I found five cases that might interest you. Two are in Jackson Mississippi, one in Hattiesburg, and two, here in New Orleans."

Vivian responded, "Which one do think is the most deserving my attention?"

"The one in Hattiesburg, for sure. College students, the girl was raped and tortured in an abandoned trailer for three days. She was gagged, and tied, and left for dead. She did die as a result of her injuries and his DNA would have convicted him, but the evidence came up missing. Without a confession, they had no case. He didn't have an alibi, but neither could they find motive, and he was eventually set free."

“Yeah, that’s one to look at. I’ll call you tomorrow when I book a flight back. I need a little time to talk with Frank about it.”

Vivian’s mind was in a whirl. She was profoundly dedicated to her mission, but just accepted the idea that she could be happy with Frank in a ‘normal’ relationship. Deep down, she knew she wasn’t ‘normal.’ She thought about what she was going to tell Frank and what she should do, going forward. She walked into the kitchen where Frank was frying a pork chop. He hummed an indistinct melody and bobbed his head as if he were listening to music when Vivian approached him from behind. She curiously asked, “What cha doing baby?”

He replied, “Frying a pork chop, you want one?”

“No, I came to talk.” Vivian sat at the table with a cup of coffee. “I just got off the phone with Kate.”

Frank took his pork chop from the skillet to his plate and set it on the counter. “Yeah, what did she have to say?”

“She applied for the nonprofit and offered an assignment.”

Frank’s mood dropped sharply. “I thought you would take some time off, for us?”

This was the delicate part of conversation she typically avoided, but it had to be answered. “Darling, I very much want you to be happy. I also have a commitment greater than my personal desires. I know we will love each other deeply while we’re together, but I will be away too often. I want you to be free, free from worry, stress, and pain.”

Frank was confused and beginning to fear a breakup. “What are you saying Vee? Are you leaving?”

“Baby, I wanted to kill myself after losing Sadie, I don’t want you to have to feel that pain of losing me that way.”

Frank understood she was hurting but running away was never the right thing to do. He held out his arms to comfort her. She was obviously emotionally confused. She stepped in between

his arms, and they embraced. Frank told her, “Sweetheart, you do what you need to do, take as much time as you need, don’t worry about me. We need to follow our dreams, right? I have a small piece of heaven here with you, when you are done saving the world, I’ll be here for you. He didn’t know what to say. He didn’t want to beg her to stay, but a big piece of his heart was breaking. As long as there’s time, there’s hope. I just hope you can one day find peace.”

She admitted, “I think I’m most afraid of getting hurt if something happened to you. I’m going to schedule a flight to Hattiesburg, Mississippi and bring closure to a family that had their little girl tragically torn out of their lives. I may also take a couple other cases while I’m there.”

Frank asked her, “How long will you be gone?”

Vivian replied, “I think about three weeks or so, and that’s why I am suggesting we slow down on the happily ever after. Everything here will run fine without me, maybe my soul can rest in the future and settle down, but this is not the time.”

Frank didn’t know the right response. He knew from the minute he met her she was independent and free. Even though his heart was breaking, she made him feel empowering and important, everything about her presence was stimulating and seductive and he’s never seen the level of passion in anyone’s eye like hers. Yes, he was hurt, but Frank was a man of character, and did his best to hide his feelings and offer her his full support. They laid together throughout the night and shared the gentlest of touches. The next morning Vivian was on the first flight off the island. She was on her way back to meet with Kate, Sasha, and Tanya. She left Frank wondering if he’d ever see her again.

She arrived early evening and took a taxi to the house. She surprised Sasha by showing up at the house out of the blue. Kate arrived shortly after, and Sasha realized Vivian had to have told Kate in advance. “Where was my heads up?” she questioned.

“Sorry, baby.” Vivian explained, “I had to say goodbye to Frank, so I’m in a bit of a funk.”

“What! What happened?” Tanya excitedly interrupted.

“Nothing happened, I just have work to do and didn’t want him involved.”

Sasha looked a little confused, “What does that have to do with not calling me in advance?”

Sasha looked at Vivian and saw that familiar expression. The sad face when she goes away. “Are you saying goodbye to us?”

Vivian sighed faintly and took Sasha’s hand, she put on a smile and said, “I looked up to you and always enjoyed doing everything with you, but I have to take responsibility for my actions without harming the ones I love. I lost Sadie, I didn’t want to lose Frank, nor you. Kate has some work for me and though we can plan it together, I’ll be going alone from here on out. No more entourage, I will never put the people I love in harm’s way again.”

They debated back and forth about the relevance of their participation and individual levels of commitment, but ultimately conceded to Vivian’s desire. Sasha knew the dangers that Vivian sought would one day destroy her, and take people close to her with her. Sasha leaned in close and softly asked Vivian, “Is it fear that harm may come to us or is it our emotional wellbeing your concerned about if something happens to you.”

“Both, but mostly fear of something happening to you. I’m a target and a magnet, I’m a candle destined to burn bright and fast. I’m not safe to be around, as Michael Fiske will soon find out.”

“Who’s Michael Fiske?” Tanya asked.

“He’s the guy I’m going to see in Hattiesburg.”

They each stayed sharp as they planned the events. Each contributed knowledge they had about the area, culture, and anything of reason. Kate provided all the case information, and

Vivian slowly assumed her battle angel role and made decisions almost as fast the question could come. Vivian interpreted the scenario fast, and having had these experiences before, knew what to do. It was second nature at this point.

Tanya asked, "What did this guy do?"

"Honey, this guy is the reason, crazy-ass bitches like me have to do what we do. He raped a girl, tortured, and killed her, and of course, law enforcement screwed it up, lost the evidence, and now he's free in a city loaded with college girls."

Vivian looked across the table to Kate, "You're pretty quiet. Can you think of anything we haven't covered?"

Kate was a little hesitant to speak, not for the content, but for the delivery. "Vee, I know you're worried about us, no matter how you look at it, we're all in this together."

Vivian replied, "Yeah, but I'm still going alone."

"I was actually referring to your new literary buddy, Randall."

"What? Why would I take him?"

Kate did her research on the Castle Rouge affair and took a page right out of Vivian's own playbook. "He has knowledge of all your crimes, what do you have on him? What would you have done with Randall during your Castle Rouge days?"

Vivian was surprised to hear that reference, but she knew she was right. The game was missing in her latest missions. "Thank you, Kate, but I can't be babysitting."

Kate replied, "Here's a thought. Let Sasha, Tanya, and Randall travel together. Randall believes he's going to be collecting material for the book, even getting some photos, meanwhile Tanya can secretly record his involvement. Then, if he feels like doing something stupid, we've got his participation in a crime to hold over him."

Vivian said, "You're still asking me to put y'all in harm's way."

“Vee, honey, it’s their choice, it has to be their choice. Their desire to help make things better cannot be denied, you taught them that. Don’t take it away from them.”

Kate proved that her big sister approach was influential, “Sasha baby, do you feel strongly about coming with me?”

Sasha replied, “Baby, you need us, we’re a team, sisters, we don’t abandon each other.”

Vivian looked at Tanya and didn’t have to ask Tanya, she was a perpetual teenager, just happy to be there, she would have followed Vivian through the desert. “Well, damn it. I guess y’all can come. Kate, you might as well ask Randall to come too.”

Kate suggested, “Tanya, can you secretly record everything Randall does?”

“Piece of cake,” she replied.

“Perfect, proving his participation in a conspiracy to commit a capital crime, across state lines, will be an easy bargaining tool. The threat of life in a federal penitentiary has a way of influencing people.”

Vivian looked at Tanya, “Looks like your expertise is once again needed Tanya. Remember Johnny? How do feel about huddling up with Randall and getting him on tape talking about the job, pictures of him at the scene, be sneaky? Can you, do it?”

Tanya didn’t hesitate, “Yeah, I’ll hook him up good.”

After anything important was discussed, and understood, Vivian went for the bottle. She poured herself a drink and returned to the sofa. She thought deeply about her fear of losing someone close and knew the clinical aspects of those fears. She was abandoned more than once, and never had a close relationship that fate didn’t take away. With a calming hand to Vivian’s shoulder, Kate told her, “Freedom comes from within, within you and within us, what greater gift is there? I’m glad you’re letting Sasha and Tanya be free.”

Vivian acknowledged, “Well when you put it that way, I’m proud of them. But I’m sure you know what that motherly

feeling is, and putting my babies in harm's way, goes against all my instincts. It's hard to let go."

Kate replied with a pleasant whisper, "Let it go."

"Thanks, I'll try."

Tomorrow they would all hit the road. It was easier than Kate thought to get Randall to volunteer to come. It was the chance of a lifetime for him, but little did he know. Sasha, Tanya, and Randall rode together, Kate and Vivian teamed up. Kate and Vivian had a fair share of other business to discuss while on the road. Things like, the Sadie trust account, turning her house into a tax shelter, expenses of running the shelter, the lease in Hawaii, her last will and testament, and the remaining funds in her offshore account. All the things Vivian didn't want to talk about.

Kate added, "Speaking of accounts, we should probably find an additional source of revenue, or restrict our activities. The government has contacted me twice in the last week to solicit your expertise on a matter they seem quite determined about."

Vivian asked, "What did you tell them?"

"I told them you were busy, but all they did was up the ante. There's money to be made if you want to forgo these other cases for a while."

"Yeah, but this has never been about money. How much money do I have left?"

Kate had been keeping track of all Vivian's expenses since she officially became her attorney, so she's seen Vivian's bank account take quite a hit, especially with all the traveling. At the rate we're going, you'll be broke in two, maybe three years."

Vivian acknowledged her spending habits and needs and conceded that continuing this crusade would require more money, but that wasn't the angle she was taking. "How much money am I expected to have left after we do these jobs?"

Kate took a moment to calculate in her head and told her, "Just under two million dollars is my best guess."



Vivian did some calculations of her own and told Kate, “Let’s finish these jobs, then worry about the next step. I think if the government wants our help, we need to make it count, I don’t trust them and I am regretting more and more, having gotten involved with them.”

Kate agreed.

## Chapter Ten

They arrived in Hattiesburg early Wednesday afternoon and got a hotel room. After freshening up a bit they went out for dinner. Throughout the evening, very little mention was made to the reason for their trip, but they all knew that once they got back to the room, intense planning and preparation would rule the evening.

Michael was easy to find, his address was in the court records. He lived in a trailer court a couple of miles from the University of Southern Mississippi campus. Kate also provided them with a photo of Mr. Fiske. The longer Vivian studied his picture, the more rage built within her. Just knowing what this animal did, made her blood boil, and the fact that he could live with himself was the fuel for her fire.

The team discussed his habits and routines and determined there was no need for an elaborate plan, no need to manipulate a schedule or draw him into a web. He lived an insignificant life with no direction, no friends, no job, no one looking after him or even aware of his existence. He was, by all accounts, a total loser. Vivian made the decision that she would, in the most simple and expedient terms, knock on his door, force herself in, plug him with holes, and leave him to the reaper.

The next day they drove to the campus to get a glimpse of his perverted playground. Just before taking his life, they wanted to try and understand what drives someone to these acts of evil madness. They were left unsatisfied. Sasha said, "I look around this campus and all I see are people mingling about, trudging through their average lives, in complete ignorance of the evils around them." She then asked Kate, "When they took your little girl, could you see what they saw, could you imagine what perverted thrills they might have been feeling? What drives people to do these things? I just don't understand."

Kate replied, “I don’t know. My baby was kind and generous, she was a good person. People that prey upon the innocent deserve no mercy.”

Vivian could tell everyone was bothered and worked up over this case, even Randall, who knew he was actively taking part in a felony, but for the same reason as the girls, it felt justified. Tanya was doing a phenomenal job recording Randall’s participation, including descriptive commentary, without his knowledge. Like it or not, he was part of a conspiracy to commit murder. Vivian interrupted, “Ok guys, in for a penny, in for a pound. What do you say we storm his trailer about nine? All of us, we just walk in, pull a Helter Skelter on his ass, take a couple pics, and call it a day?”

Kate spoke up, “I’m sorry Vee, I can’t take a chance of being there because if I were to be implicated, I wouldn’t be able to represent you in court, if need be.”

“I understand,” she said.

Randall saw an out and thought he’d apply the same, “I shouldn’t be there either.”

Vivian laughed, “Whose writing this book? How can you accurately record this event without witnessing it? Sure, I can tell you that he cried, that it was gruesome, that he got what he deserved, but if it’s all left to imagination, it would be fiction.”

Randall saw her point with regard to documentation but being there would make him an accessory. “I’m just trying to tell your story Vee, I’m not trying to join the team, if you know what I mean.”

“Baby, you’re already an accessory, we’ve been planning this together, you’ve known what this is all about from day one. Now is your chance to see for yourself that evil doesn’t get to rule over the innocent without consequence. You saw his file, you know what he did, aren’t you even a little interested in seeing justice prevail?”

It was so hard for him to answer because he did have a conscience, and deep inside, wanted a dreadful ending to his miserable life. “Ok,” he said. “But I’m just there to record the event.”

“Good,” Vivian said. “It’s settled then, if he’s home at nine, we’ll get it done, if he’s not, we’ll break in and wait for him.”

Vivian understood Kate’s position for remaining distant from the actual crime and requirement for deniability, so Kate staying back at the hotel was a non-issue. Randall on the other hand, had a date with destiny. Vivian gave Tanya one simple job, to get Randall on camera at the scene while Michael faced his final judgement.

They arrived at his trailer just before nine. A dim light shown through the dirty stained curtains to the right of the door. Vivian assumed it was the kitchen area and when she saw a shadow pass from left to right. Vivian told the gang, “Stand over here,” pointing to the right, which would shield them from view as he opened the door. “Are you ready? Follow me.”

She stood on his rickety steps and knocked on his door. He pulled the little curtain away from the port hole in the door only to see a beautiful woman on the other side. A beautiful stranger at his door was definitely suspicious, but his lustful ignorance disregarded common sense and he opened the door and said, “Ain’t you all kind of pretty, how can I help you?”

Vivian’s image of him, standing at the door in his boxers, aggravated her sense of decency, but she put it aside long enough to verify that he was indeed her man. She gave Michael a big smile and said, “Michael Fiske? This is your lucky day.”

His eyes opened wide, not knowing what to expect, but her enthusiasm got him excited. Vivian suddenly stepped up, and with her hand on his chest and her knife at his belly, she pushed him back into the trailer and onto a filthy sofa against the wall. Sasha, Randall, and Tanya followed them in and shut the door

quickly behind them. Michael was frantically begging Vivian to calm down. “What’s going on? Who are you?”

“We’re here on Emily Sweeney’s behalf,” Vivian spoke with authority.

A lump formed in his throat. He realized they were there for revenge and his chances of talking his way out of it didn’t look too good. He started looking around the trailer for something to use as a weapon, all the while aware of the proximity of her knife to his abdomen. “I’m innocent,” he said. “It wasn’t me.”

Vivian said, “Relax, we’re not here to try you, you’ve already been found guilty in our court of righteousness, we’re here to carry out the sentence.”

“Wait, what?” he cried.

“It’s time for you to get right with the lord, because your days of preying on people are over.”

Michael was scared, really scared. He saw nothing but seriousness in Vivian’s eyes and with the others standing behind her as witnesses, he believed she was going to kill him. He began to whimper and snuffle, “Please, I may have done some bad things but killing me isn’t going to make anything better.”

Vivian said, “That’s where you are wrong. It’s going to make everything better; you don’t deserve to be walking among the living.” Vivian then turned to Randall, “Talk to him, ask him what was going through his mind when he raped, tortured, and killed Emily. Ask him why he deserves to live.”

Randall was suddenly overcome with desire to investigate the truth, and what was going through this guy’s mind could help to stop other’s crimes like his. The need to get the story overtook any thought of common sense and he asked him, “If this were your chance to be forgiven by God, what would you say? What pleasures did you expect when you killed that girl?”

While Michael fearfully contemplated his answer, Sasha stood apathetically calm, staring at Michael as if he were a bag of trash to be thrown in a dumpster. Tanya had her phone in her

hand, stealthily filming the entire encounter. Randall was center frame, and the situation grew more intense as Vivian poked him in the chest with her knife.

Michael's fight or flight instincts gave him the courage to take his last chance at freedom by grabbing Vivian's wrist in an attempt to take her knife, but he was no match for Vivian's remarkable reflexes. She pulled back, and with precision, she stabbed his arm and hand three times, then placed the knife under his chin. "Go ahead, try it again," she challenged. "I like competition."

Michael was crying fluently by now, begging for mercy and forgiveness.

Vivian took over the questioning and asked him, "Answer his question, you piece of shit, what was going through your mind?"

He stuttered a bit and said, "I couldn't help it. She was so hot, I had to have her, but she didn't want to come with me. One thing led to another, I am so sorry, I didn't mean to hurt her."

Vivian said, "See, even in the face of holy redemption, he cannot be honest."

Michael's eyes got really big as Vivian posed in a warrior stance, with her knife pointing directly at his face. For just that moment, the air in the trailer went dead, the excitement froze in a stale calm; everything went quiet, and Vivian plunged her knife into his chest. She punctured his heart with the one quick jab and told him, "Like I told you, this is your lucky day, you no longer have to live a miserable existence." She stabbed him two more times and carved a V on his forehead. He laid there cold, scared, and shaking, moaning, and gasping, for one last breath.

This was Tanya's first time to witness Vivian's ruthless commitment to her craft and convictions. She knew then, she didn't have what it took to do what Vivian does. Even though she knew Michael deserved to die, she couldn't help feeling that a chance for his salvation still existed and felt sorry for him. In a

surprising twist, Randall saw the meaning in Vivian's statement with regard to Michael's irredeemable dishonesty.

Randall looked down upon his lifeless body and envisioned a white chalk outline on that dirty trailer floor and muttered, "He was undoubtedly, in his mind, face to face with his maker, and still, he couldn't bring himself to be honest. No one can torture someone for three days and claim they didn't mean it. Why couldn't he at least admit he was mental or emotionally troubled?"

Sasha said, "Because, he's like most men, they believe women are possessions, things to play with, unequal, undeserving, and not as important as them."

"Randall replied, "I don't think that way."

"I would hope not. We're counting on you to help educate society that it's time to stop treating us with disrespect."

"Ok now," Vivian interrupted. "We're on the same team. This creep is done, I say we go get a drink."

Tanya looked at Vivian and nodded her head with her phone in her hand, indicating she got everything on camera.

"Let's go," Vivian said. They filed out of the trailer and crossed the street to their car. The night would prove even more enlightening when they reached the bar.

Sasha asked, "Is this like the third 'Nicks Bar' in this state?"

Tanya laughed, "You mean in this city."

The gang sat at a table near the juke box. Across the bar were two large screen TVs, both had news stations on instead of sports. Randall looked at the screens and mentioned, "Isn't odd that a sports pub doesn't have football or other sports on TV?"

Vivian had changed from bourbon to beer while in Hawaii but wanted to distance herself from that part of her life. Her taste for bourbon returned, but she would be denied. Nick lost his liquor license and could only sell beer.

They started to notice the television reports were that two different stations running different stories about the same thing, Vivian. One station reported on the body count like it was a ball game and Vegas was taking bets. The other covered the residual effects and outcomes. The crime statistics told a completely different story, one which had the public taking a second look at what they thought of corporal punishment.

Vivian walked to the bar and ordered five Heinekens. While standing at the bar, Kate arrived. From the closest TV, they could hear that an FBI whistleblower leaked information to the news, anonymously of course. Kate mentioned to Vivian, "Isn't it something? You own the news."

Vivian replied, "No, if I owned the news, we'd be seeing more stories of corrupt judges and cops going to jail."

Kate asked, "So, how did it go?"

While Vivian and Kate were trying to talk and discuss the adventure, Sasha and Tanya were studying the news behind them intensely, and said, "Vee, listen to this story on TV." The story continued by showing graphs and charts of how violent crimes from New Orleans to Houston have dropped thirty percent in one month. Lawmakers were having the most difficult time, arguing that it wasn't a good thing. The news was touting the large drop in crime as the result of a better way to function and the government went on the defense.

Kate said, "We've got awareness. It's progress."

The other story was a more gruesome tale of a psychopathic serial killer. Tanya said, "That other story is ugly. I'll bet that editor is an old man who beats his wife."

That's not at all what Randall thought it was. He knew it was competition. Other people are writing and trying to use Vivian to boost their careers. Their stories and efforts could ruin and diminish his hard work and expose his most recent involvement with one Mr. Michael Fiske. This was not good for Randal. He stayed quiet all night.



There was an undeniable sense of importance for all of them. All across the south, cities and neighborhoods were a little safer, having had dozens of repeat violent offenders removed from society, and many more deterred. Yet, the feeling that zealots were on their tail was a feeling none could ignore.

Traveling to Jackson came up in conversation which circled back to going home to New Orleans. Before the night was up, Randall was asked to go home. Vivian put her hand out to Tanya and Tanya put her phone in Vivian's hand. She pressed play on a video where Randall was questioning Michael, she showed it to him. Vivian peacefully looked into Randall's eye, "We're in this together, if you are going to portray me, you have to be a part of me. Now, go and make me proud."

He was stunned. He was a study of Vivian Bouvier, seductress of Castle Rouge, and failed to see his own setup coming. "Vee, after all we've been through together, I can't believe you would resort to blackmail?"

She laughed, "No, not blackmail, insurance. You see, I don't want anything from you, but you should be reminded that decisions have consequences, and anyone that knows me, knows I believe in consequences."

Randall heard that message loud and clear. He said, "How am I to get home?"

Vivian nodded, "Yeah, well, all of you are going home in Sasha's car, Kate and I are going to Jackson."

This was news to everyone. Sasha said, "Excuse me?"

Tanya belted, "What?"

Randall felt relieved.

Vivian explained, "We had a good run here, it was a simple job. I agreed we could all do this together for that reason, but Jackson will be different. There are too many elements that can go wrong. I really wish you'd stay home for this one and reach out to the girls needing our help."

Sasha knew there was more to it than that, but respected Vivian's wishes and agreed to go home. Tanya didn't see it and continued to argue, "You need us Vee, we're a team. We've always done things together, why do you want to shut us out?"

Vivian replied, "Baby, I have a lot on my plate, I'm still trying to get over, Francois, Sadie, and now Frank, I need to prioritize my life and finishing the Jackson job alone will keep me focused, otherwise, I may be thinking of relationships when I should be thinking about what's around the next corner."

Tanya somewhat understood and agreed to let it go.

The following day, Sasha, Tanya, and Randall left for New Orleans, while Kate and Vivian drove north to Jackson. Kate remarked, "I hate this town. I've been here three times; all three times were for extradition hearings. Criminals fled Louisiana, got caught in Mississippi, and Mississippi wanted to supersede our case against them regardless of the severity of the crime. Power hungry prosecutors with political aspirations."

Vivian replied, "Sounds just like New Orleans."

Kate had always taken her duty as District Attorney serious, until her little girl was killed, of course. She agreed, "Yeah, I guess so. I'm glad I never got that political bug."

Their drive to Jackson didn't take nearly as long as they thought it would, probably because they talked all the way there. They discussed the two brothers they were going to Jackson for and acknowledged that this case was different in many ways. The first was that neither had even been accused, much less convicted of a crime. The second was that they were educated professionals and had standing in the community. The third and most conspicuous trait was their high-profile connection to members of the state senate. Kate explained, "These guys have been able to run and rule a ring of child pornography right under the noses of the entire legal system. From judges, prosecutors, lawyers, bankers, and congressman, little girls are shipped in and out for the demented pleasures of the elites."

Vivian asked, “I don’t understand, how can these things be happening? It irks the living shit out of me; I just want to cut them all.”

“I know. It irks me too. These reports come from a nine-month investigation by a private investigator who recently went missing. That’s how it made it to my list. Craig was a family friend, and I’d sure like to know what happened to him.

“I don’t know if I can help with that, I don’t have the patience for investigation. Just point these dudes out, and I can take care of them.”

Kate added, “The last link he shared before disappearing, was that the brothers met with Lieutenant Governor at Parlor Market for lunch reservations. It’s unclear what they talked about, but whatever it was, I believe it got my Craig killed. He called me and said he had important information about the duo and asked to meet me that evening. He never showed.”

Vivian asked, “So you think the Lieutenant Governor is involved?”

“I don’t know, but the brothers definitely are.”

“For me, I don’t need a smoking gun, I’ll off these two just for a belief, but what would the public outcry be if they were portrayed as innocent victims?”

Kate said, “That’s part of what makes this case so unique, I think if anything else, it will put the corrupt elite on notice.”

Kevin and Keith Duncan were twins, from Memphis, and the sons of the former Governor of Tennessee. They were also into some very perverse activity. They used their political advantages to gain access to inner government circles and provide the most elicit of experiences to their high-end clientele. It made the brothers in demand and very wealthy. This was a business to them, one that takes an incredible amount of discretion. Vivian studied Kate’s notes about these two and figured she’d seen their game before.

Vivian told Kate, “They’re most likely going to have a bodyguard or two.”

“Yes, it seems likely, but Craig didn’t mention anything about it, we’ll just have to assume he has.”

Vivian said, “You know, these guys are identical twins, you know they’re going to be together about the whole time. I’d like to get them on the dance floor.”

Kate asked, “Dance floor?”

“Yeah, a little trick I learned in Biloxi. Shock and awe. As you’re dancing and spinning, others are dancing and spinning, and the dance floor can be a confusing place. At some point the brothers would be within feet of each other and can both be taken out within seconds. Confusion and chaos would break out on the dance floor, and I could simply walk away unnoticed. Everyone would be focusing on the victim.”

Kate looked at Vivian with a confused look on her face, “How does that work, and how does someone figure that out?”

Vivian laughs lightly, “Oh yeah, it works. People are so simple. They would all be focusing on the gruesome body, no one would notice the driver walking. Advantages of being a ghost.”

“Amazing concept and you may be in luck. The Governors Ball is coming up this weekend.”

Vivian knew about the ball, that’s why she mentioned dancing. Vivian read some of Kate’s notes she had in her purse while she went to the restroom. Even with Kate, Vivian didn’t mind exercising a little psych trick. “Can you get us invited?”

Kate said, “I think I can get you an invite, but I should stay clear.”

“Kate, what are you doing, why are you here. You obviously believe in what we’re doing yet you hide from it.”

Kate replied, “I’m scared, Vee, alright. Not for getting caught, I’ve lived my life in the justice system, but for my soul. What happens if I do what you do, and I like it? It scares me.”

Vivian understood all too well, “Yeah, honey, I understand. I was scared the first time I cut someone, maybe that’s why it doesn’t bother me now. Maybe because it was either me or them, the choice was easier.”

Kate admitted, “I wish it were that easy. I’m forty-five, lost my family, lost my career, I’m all alone. I’m at least trying to keep my wits, but I’m afraid that’s in jeopardy too.”

“Relax, Kate, what you need is a good old fashion massage.”

Kate believed her suggestion to be an invitation for intimacy and once again shied away because of fear. She replied, “I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong impression, I don’t really think about other women.”

Vivian laughed, “Not all physical contact with another woman is sexual, but it’s obvious that you’ve never been with another woman. If you had, you might have realized that it takes the best of all six senses to properly please a woman.”

Kate was just one generation ahead of Vivian, but she felt much older. Something about Vivian’s comment intrigued her, so she asked, “What do you mean, best of all six senses?”

Vivian went on to explain, “I’ve been around, you know, I’ve had men and women, one thing I’ve realized is, that some people smell bad, some people taste bad, some people are ugly, some are just disgusting, but once in a while, someone comes along who pleases all of your senses, and when your minds connect and you experience the same life’s poem in your hearts, you know love. That’s what I had with Sadie, it didn’t have to be a woman, but it was. I almost had that with Frank, but the magic wasn’t there. What I’m trying to say, you never know who you will meet or what pleasures await you, without a willingness to experience it. Being stuck on the sidelines is not the place to be. Haven’t you tested the waters long enough?”

Kate was beside herself. Vivian was more like a daughter than a sister and she had her questioning her own sexuality. They

had been parked in front of a hotel for the past ten minutes. Vivian saw a scared little girl in Kate's face and opened her arms and asked Kate, "Will you give me a hug?"

Kate leaned over to hug her in a cordial fashion, but Vivian knew how a hug was supposed to be. She pulled herself closer to her and wrapped her arms around lower and middle back, holding her chest to chest. Vivian then took her right hand and slid it up to the back of Kate's head and held her face to face. She didn't say anything, she just slid her cheek very gently aside Kate's and took a noticeable whiff of her neck. Kate could feel Vivian's warm breath on her neck and suddenly noticed Vivian's perfume. It made her heart race.

Kate released from their embrace and sighed heavily. "Wow, that's a little weird, it was nice, really nice, but I'm just not comfortable."

Vivian said, "Ok then, can you at least get with the program and get involved, with me, in this plan. Do something in your life, and if you change your mind, I get lonely too."

Kate replied, "All right, you talked me into it, what do you want me to do?"

"That will depend on if you can get us invited to the Governor's Ball. For now, I think I'll go to my room and take a nice long bath, you could make some calls about that invite."

About an hour later Kate came to Vivian's room. "I'm sorry Vee, it's a no go for the Governor's Ball."

"Ok, what's our next option?"

Kate told her that the brothers frequented the Market Parlor quite often, which could be a way to meet.

Vivian questioned, "What are we going to have to do? Make reservations every day till they come in?"

"No, just show up, if they're there, we can wing-it."

Vivian mentioned, "I suppose if I have to, I can stake out the restaurant and follow him home."

They visited the restaurant for the next two days at eleven forty-five, to see if they would show. On the second day, they were rewarded with Keith's presence alone at his usual table. Vivian quietly spoke to the girl taking reservations and told her, "My fiancé doesn't know I'm back from LA, I'd like to surprise him if you don't mind." She put her finger to her mouth signaling to keep a secret, slipped her twenty dollars, and walked over to where he was sitting. Kate was waiting in the car for a call from Vivian.

Vivian was dressed in an elegant navy-blue dress and patent leather heels. With all the experience she had with makeup, she was a master at disguise, but for this portrayal, she needed to wow them and came into the restaurant looking absolutely stunning. She walked past Keith on the way to the restrooms and he felt her presence as she passed. On her way back she surprised him by stopping and asking him, "Excuse me, may I sit with you for just a spell, my friend is on the way here, but there's a problem with our reservation and I didn't want to wait at the door in shame."

He stood up and said, "Sure, I can talk with management if you like? I come here all the time."

"That's very kind of you, but I wouldn't want to intrude any more than I already have."

Keith couldn't help smelling Vivian's perfume, "Is that Joy perfume you're wearing?"

She replied, "You know your perfume."

He went on to say, "It's amazing, most people who wear that have a tendency of over doing it, but you wear it so well, I love it."

Vivian thought for a second that it was a shame she had to kill this guy; most men don't appreciate a well-chosen perfume. "Thank you," she politely responded.

Keith put out his hand and introduced himself, "Keith Duncan, it's a pleasure to meet you."

She took his hand, “My friends call me Vee, likewise, a pleasure.” They sat down and Vivian clarified, “My friend shouldn’t be long, and I’ll be out of your hair. I do appreciate you saving me the embarrassment.”

Keith was a handsome man in his own right, but Vivian’s beauty was such that all men would stare. Her sitting at his table lifted his ego and he proposed, “I’m waiting for my brother, we’re having a business lunch together, he should be here any minute himself. If your reservation is screwed up, why don’t you and your friend join us?”

Vivian smiled and chuckled a bit, “You don’t even know if my friend is male or female.”

Keith replied, “You right, I was only thinking about getting to know you better, I apologize if I am out of line.”

She laughed again, “No you’re fine, and it’s ok. My friend is like my big sister, I think I should call her and find out where she’s at.” She pulled her phone out of her purse and called Kate. “Where are you, they screwed up our reservation, but we’ve been invited to join someone.” A moment of a reply passed, and Vivian continued, “yes, he’s cute,” Vivian replied and gave Keith a wink. She hung up the phone and told Keith, “She’s parking the car as we speak, her name is Kate.”

“Great, I think I see my brother walking in the door right now.”

Kevin walked up to the table with a curious look on his face, “I didn’t know we were going to have company.”

“Kev, this is Vee, her reservation got screwed up and I offered to let her join us.”

Kevin was more businesslike than Keith but a gentleman just the same, “Vee, is your name? Victoria, but my friends call me Vee.”

Keith added, “Vee also has a friend coming.”

“So, I guess we’re not going to be talking shop today.”

Vivian asked, “What kind of work are you into?”



Before he could answer, Kate walked through the door. She too, was given Vivian's magic makeup touch and looked stunning and sophisticated. "There's my friend," Vivian said.

Keith pointed and waved to the registration girl to usher her over to their table.

Kevin and Keith stood when she got to the table and introduced themselves.

Vivian told Kate, "Keith and Kevin are in business together, but we haven't gotten into what line of work they're in."

"Service industry," Kevin said.

"That's funny, so am I." Vivian said.

Keith asked, "What type of service?"

Kate played her part well by opening her eyes wide and acting surprised that Vivian would talk to strangers about it, which wasn't lost on Kevin who was always the sceptic.

Vivian leaned in a little and quietly said, "I'm a madam. I have a high-end escort service in New Orleans."

Keith asked, "Escort service?"

Vivian replied, "I'm sorry, did I embarrass you?"

He said, "Not at all."

Kate asked Kevin, "How about you? What kind of service do you provide?"

"We're entertainment promoters, I hate it but the money's good."

Keith asked, "When you say high-end, what do you mean?"

Vivian explained, "I take broken girls and turn them into sexual goddesses. It's challenging but the end product is extremely lucrative." Vivian had one of Sasha's business cards in her purse and pulled it out. The card was colorful yet classy and read 'Royal Princess Escorts and Company.' Keith took the card and looked at it closely, then Vivian took it back. "Sorry, Keith, I appreciate your kindness letting us sit with you and all, but I don't give out my card to anyone that hasn't been vetted. I make it a

point to keep my business personal and until I know I can fully trust you; I can't have my card floating out there."

That was something Kevin could understand. Her being open to what she does but careful enough not to convict herself was a talent in the arena of discrete business dealings.

As it turned out, they had a wonderful lunch, and before they left, Vivian asked Keith and Kevin, "Do you have a card?"

Keith replied, "No, I'm sorry, I don't have any on me."

Vivian pulled out her card again and gave it to Keith, "Write your number on the back, maybe I'll give you a call, maybe we can get together on my dime next time."

Keith was smitten with Vivian, and though Kate was a few years older than Kevin, she could tell by the end of the afternoon, he too was interested. Vivian and Kate left them sitting at the table wondering how strange and coincidental it was that they would meet, and out of the blue, brighten their day with exciting promises.

As Vivian and Kate drove off, they discussed their mannerism and behavior, and found it very confusing. "They were perfect gentlemen," Vivian said.

"Yeah, it's hard to believe they can sell girls as sex slaves. That's the real problem here. It's not so much the perversion of it, the fact that people can turn a blind eye to this depravity and profit from it. The fact that they can live in their crystal palace while walking all over the lives of these poor girls kills me, it magnifies the sickness and makes it worse."

Vivian asked, "How good is your intel?"

"Craig said he had documents and photos, but he never got the chance to deliver. I believe him one hundred percent."

"That's good enough for me. I think we should give these two a couple of days then call them back. It would be ideal to get them together, alone in their house. Even if there's a bodyguard around, I know how to handle that."

Kate replied, “That’s the scary part that I warned you about. I’m not a field agent, Vee.”

Vivian eased her worry, “Don’t worry, honey, you’ll be my driver. You won’t have to go in. As long as they’re both in the general vicinity, I can handle them, it’ll be just fine.”

## Chapter Eleven

Vivian waited until the weekend before calling Keith. She knew she would only have few chances to get close to him and even fewer chances to get them both together in position. Her plan was to get them both in the house together but to do that she needed an invitation, breaking in didn't appear to be an option. His upscale lifestyle, and considerably illegal activities, all but assured that he would have an alarm system in his house, and she wasn't familiar with such things, so she laid on the charm heavy when she got him on the phone.

"Is this Keith?" she asked.

"It is," he replied.

"Hi. it's Vee, we met at the Parlor, did I catch you at a bad time?"

"No, not at all. I'm getting ready to go out, but I have time to talk."

Vivian knew today was the Governor's Ball and that the brothers would be attending. She also knew that they would have to return home at some point and probably be together. "You're going out? In that case, I won't keep you long. I just wanted you to know that I checked you out, I'm sorry, but I had to make certain you weren't a fed, a girl can't be too careful you know."

Keith laughed, "That is funny, a cop is one thing no one has even accused me of being. I checked you out too, I haven't found anybody that's heard of the Royal Princess Escorts and Company."

"Appointment only, loyal clientele, anyway, you were so nice to me and Kate, not to mention being handsome, that I just wanted to extend my appreciation by doing something for you."

He asked, "Yeah, what do you have in mind?"

Vivian then offered some bait, "As you may suspect, my girls are professionals, I'd like to send you and Kevin a present."

It didn't take Keith long to realize what an encounter with Vivian's girl's might be like and got a little excited. But playing into his ego was her goal and offering a substitute gave him the opportunity to play her game. "You want to send us some girls?"

"Sure, you can then judge for yourself how well I train my pride."

He replied, "Pride, what, are you raising lions?"

She laughed, "Oh yeah, they certainly are, they are all that and more, in bed anyway."

Keith was now very interested to hear a little more, but not without the chase. "I was kind of hoping we could get together again. I'm not so much into paid romance."

"Well, Kate and I could find a way to spend a little time with you but be warned, Kate hasn't been with a man since her husband died, and I have an insatiable thirst for pleasure, once is never enough if you get my drift."

That sentence alone sealed his decision to work something out. "Yeah, I have a big dinner thing going on tonight, what do you say we get together afterward?"

"Are you talking to me, or me and Kate?"

"I was talking to you, but if Kate is coming with you, I'm sure I can talk Kevin into hanging around. To be honest, he was impressed with Kate but he's not as open with women as I am."

Vivian said, "Yes, Kate goes everywhere with me, I'm teaching her to loosen up and enjoy life again, it's hard starting over after a loss."

"I understand. Listen, how about I send you a text with my address? This thing I'm going to start at nine, we can sneak out and be home by midnight. We can't go anywhere in our monkey suits and will have to go home to change anyway. Can you meet us at my house around midnight?"

"I think we could manage, by the way, you don't have any dogs, do you?"

Keith thought an odd, "Dogs? No."

Vivian replied, "Good, Kate is afraid to death of dogs."

"Ok, she's safe, we don't have any dogs, but I do have a housekeeper, her name is Carla, if you get there before we get back, I'll leave word for her to let you in."

"That sounds wonderful. Do you have anything to drink in your house?"

"Funny you should ask; I have a wine collection many would kill for."

She didn't want to offend him, he was obviously proud of his collection, "I'm sorry darling, I had a most unpleasant experience the last time I had wine, I think I'd prefer something a little more bite."

He replied, "Of course, I've got a liquor cabinet too."

"It's settled, send me your address, and Kate and I will see you at home around midnight."

Vivian hung up the phone and looked across the table at Kate, "We're in."

Kate was in awe, she watched Vivian twist the entire conversation right where she wanted it to go. "I am officially impressed. You make manipulation look so easy."

Vivian laughed, "Kate, honey, anyone with a vagina can lead a man over a cliff if she waves it at him right."

Kate laughed, she had never, in her forty-five years, used sex as a bargaining chip and realized she had cheated herself out of many missed opportunities. "Ok, we know they have a housekeeper, and no dogs. They have wine and liquor, they'll be away from the house until midnight, what's next?"

Vivian crossed her arms, leaned back in her chair, and looked off to the side at the bed, "I know you don't want to get your hands dirty, but I could really use you on the inside. I envision a scenario where Keith and I are in one room, you, and Kevin in another, I kill Keith quietly and quickly, then enter your room, you get up and leave, then I kill Kevin."

“Yeah, you got me all screwed up in the head here. Am I expected to have sex with him? What if I have to try and fight him off? I’ve never done anything like this before.”

“Kate, honey, you’ve seen movies, I’m sure. The actors are just acting, they’re pretending to be someone else. You dig down into yourself and pull out that alter ego in you. Haven’t you ever dreamt of having sex with two people at once, or another woman, or being a master spy seducing a foreign agent. You have to escape yourself to find yourself.”

Kate admitted, “You make it sound so easy, effortlessly preying on the secret desires of people, me on the other hand, I’m scared to death.”

Vivian understood and took her hand, “Look, we’ll take it slow, have a few drinks, loosen up a bit, unbutton a button here, kick off our shoes, before you know it, the boys will be imagining us naked. From there, we separate off to different rooms and within a minute or two, before you can even get undressed, I’ll be there to end it all.”

“What about the housekeeper?”

Vivian smiled and shook her head, “You don’t think they going to want her around while they’re doing the nasty with a couple of women, do you? No, they send her away within minutes of returning home.”

Kate addressed her comments about acting, “You make it sound so easy. Kevin’s a nice-looking man, but I have no intention of having sex with him.”

“You don’t have to; you just need to convince him that it’s possible.”

“And how can I do that, I’ve never played the field in my life.”

Vivian took another shot at getting intimate with her, she took both of Kate’s hands and looked deep into her eyes, “Fear is that which you don’t understand.” She pulled Kate a little closer and whispered, “To understand, you have to experience, is my

kiss less passionate because I'm a woman, is my love less comforting because I have no penis? We're flowers in the garden of Eden, kiss me, and tell me you don't feel me in your loins."

Kate's heart was racing, she felt the secret passion she'd been denying, and the nervous jitters in her hands signaled she was not in control of her emotions. She pulled back just a little, but as she looked into Vivian's eyes and began to experience the hidden passion overtaking her senses. She smelled her smell, felt her soft touch, and for a moment, felt her heartbeat in synchrony with hers. She closed her eyes and allowed Vivian's lips to roam across face and neck. Kate suddenly became fully committed to a relationship she had never imagined and opened up to Vivian's full and desirable love.

Kate cried tears of joy, pleasure, shame, and guilt. "I don't know if this was wrong, but it felt so right. How could I be such a brood to hold these fears for so long."

Vivian held Kate's head to her chest, "Honey, love is not a man and woman thing, it's to two people experiencing themselves honestly, taking the time to enjoy and appreciate each other without social stigmas of religious righteousness and persecution. You shouldn't feel ashamed, you should feel loved."

Kate thought about what she said and held her a little tighter. They laid together in warm embrace, foregoing acts of sexual pleasure and concentrated on an honest connection of the heart. After Kate relaxed and became comfortable holding her, Vivian changed the subject to something equally personal. "Kate, honey, I think I'm in trouble."

"What do you mean?"

I've been away from Frank for three weeks, my period's two weeks late. I think I may be pregnant."

"Oh my," Kate said. "I don't know how to respond. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I'm going to be thirty in a couple of weeks, I've never considered being a mother, I didn't want to bring kids



into this world. I had never forgot to take my birth control pills until I went to Hawaii. I think changing my routine, from bourbon to beer, and sunrises to sunsets, screwed up my clock.”

Kate suggested, “You need to know; you should probably get a test kit from the pharmacy.”

“Yeah, I will. In either, case, please don’t tell anyone, especially Frank.”

Kate asked, “You’re not going to tell Frank?”

“No, as a matter of fact, pregnant or not, I’ve given great thought to finding a way to escape all of this. Your government guys can make it look like I’ve been killed in a raid or something, which would allow me to disappear as Veronica Caine once and for all and leave all this killing behind.”

Kate asked, “What about the two jobs in New Orleans?”

Vivian looked at Kate, “If I’m pregnant, I want this to be my last job. If not, we have time, and can finish the two in New Orleans, but eventually, all this has to end, and given the choice, ending on my terms is highly preferred.”

Kate asked, “What about the baby? Are you going to keep it?”

“My mother gave me up before I ever knew her, I’ll be damned if I’m going to do that to my baby. I’ll keep it and love it, boy or girl, it’ll have a better life because of me not in spite of me.”

“What about Frank? Don’t you think he’d like to know that he was a father?”

“Right now, he has his whole life ahead of him, I knew I wasn’t the wife and mother kind of girl, it was a big mistake, one that doesn’t have to anchor him down. He’ll move on and be perfectly happy never knowing.”

“The baby doesn’t need a father?”

“No.” Vivian grew tired of thinking and talking about it and changed the subject. “If you talk with Martin, let him know I want to talk with him.”

Kate understood her boundaries with regard to Vivian's emotions and decided not to push. "Sure," she replied, "I think I can get in touch with him."

Vivian and Kate got to the brothers' house an hour early. They wanted to be comfortable within the surroundings before they arrived, lying in wait. As they approached the house, Vivian stopped Kate from driving into the gate, she told her, "Park out here on the street. If our car is on the inside and the gate closes, we may have trouble getting out."

"Good call," Kate said, and parked on the side of the street, one house down across the street, it was too obvious. They walked up to and around the gate, then up to the house. The doorbell chimed with a gong.

Carla answered the door sharply and Vivian said, "Hi, the boys are expecting us." Vivian sized up Carla within a second. In a flash vision, Vivian saw Carla's abuse in her face. The anguish of being a single mother trying to feed her kids, working for an ungrateful prick at midnight, all for three hundred dollars a week.

Carla was cordial and showed them into the parlor, "Yes ma'am, he told me to make you comfortable till they get back. There's alcohol and a stereo over there."

Vivian wasn't the only one to notice, Carla had bruising around her arms and throat that resembled fingers. Kate looked upon Carla with a sense of concern. Vivian asked, "Do you really want to make us comfortable? Have a drink with us, and tell me about yourself?"

Carla couldn't explain it, but Vivian's eyes told her, 'trust me.' Carla said the first thing that came to her mind, "I'm sorry ma'am, you shouldn't be here, these boys are no good."

Vivian has seen hundreds of abused faces and it never gets easier. Vivian took a thousand dollars from her purse and handed it to Carla. "Here, take this, and find a better job. Forget about these bums."

“You don’t understand,” Carla insisted. “They’re really bad, they will hurt you.”

Vivian smiled at her, chuckled a bit, then laughed in Kate’s direction. “Don’t worry about us darling, we’ll be fine, you just need to take care of yourself.”

Kate asked her, “Do they have a security alarm system?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know the code?”

Carla replied, “3044#, are you going to rob them?”

Vivian snickered, “Not exactly, let’s just say we’re here to introduce them to religion.”

Carla was confused, but it didn’t matter to her anyway, a thousand bucks would hold her over long enough to get a better job. Carla gave them a quick tour of the house, introduced Vivian to the bar, and most important, it gave Vivian her bearings of how she would maneuver through the house. Where and when to strike was the only decision still left to make.

At a quarter to midnight, the automatic lights in the drive came on and the gate opened. Kevin and Keith returned from the Ball as promised and seemed anxious to be home. They entered the house carrying their Tuxedo jackets and excitedly greeted the girls. Keith told Carla, “That’s all, you can go.”

The first thing Vivian noticed was he didn’t even have the decency to use her name. The second was the lack of appreciation for staying here till midnight. Vivian had all she needed to know about Keith Duncan burned in head. As Carla walked out, she saw Vivian give her a wink, which gave her an odd feeling of resolve. Who were these women?

Kevin untied his bow tie and asked Kate and Vivian if they wanted a drink. Keith was selecting a litany of musical inspirations from his wall mounted sound system. Vivian looked across at Kate smiling like the Cheshire Cat. A song began playing from speakers all around the room. Vivian walked over to Kate and said, “Dance with me, we can talk in front of them

this way. She put her hands in the small of Kate's back and the brother's coordination suddenly stumbled. Vivian whispered in Kate's ear, "We need to speed this entire night up. How fast can I get Keith alone in a room?"

Their dance did more than just heighten the mood, Keith was already making hints about getting naked. Suddenly the music changed to Teddy Pendergrass singing, 'If you don't know me by now' and Vivian smiled at Kate and nodded. She knew the player's playbook better than they did. She looked at Keith and asked, "What, no 'Unchanged melody'?"

He laughed and nodded his head back to the side, as if to point to the hallway. She looked at Kate and winked, signaling the games had begun.

This was a vulnerable time for Kate, she hadn't been with another man since her husband and certainly not with a dangerous one. Vivian promised to make it very fast so all she had to do was stall.

Meanwhile, Vivian stripped out of her dress while she walked to the bedroom. By the time they entered the bedroom, her dress and shoes were in her hand, and she walked naked in behind him. Once in the room, he turned around to witness her naked beauty. He tried to maintain what little composure he had left, while struggling to get undressed. She gracefully laid her dress across the back of a chair, set her shoes on the floor below the chair, and opened her purse to retrieve her blade. Just as Keith put one hand down on the bed to balance himself, Vivian stepped forward and thrust her knife in his back and into his heart.

He was the lucky one. He wouldn't live long enough to feel her blade dance on his face. She turned him over and carved a big V on his forehead. She then threw the sheet over him. Less than two minutes in the room and Vivian came running out excitedly, "Hurry, hurry, she hollered. Come quick, something happened, I think he's having a heart attack or something."

Kate and Kevin were kissing on the sofa when Vivian's news shocked and startled them. Kevin jumped up right away and ran to the room. Vivian whispered to Kate, get ready to go."

Kate whispered back, "Oh my god, you sounded so real I believed you."

Kevin ran into the room, saw Keith laying under a blood-soaked sheet. He pulled the sheet up and saw the carnage. In disbelief and shock, he turned only to find Vivian standing naked behind him with her knife in her hand.

Vivian stabbed him quickly twice in the chest and he fell back struggling to catch his breath. The fear in his eyes was Vivian's secret desire. He choked, gagged, and coughed up blood. She bent over him and told him, "Before your lungs fill with blood and you die, there's one thing I want to know. Did you feel pity, or remorse? Did you feel shame, sadness, or guilt? Did you empathize with them, or at least feel bad? You have destroyed lives and today is your judgement day." He clutched his arms around his chest, fighting to understand what was going on.

Vivian softly and calming told him, "Not every angel brings salvation, I'm sending you to hell." At that point she grabbed a fist full of his hair and carved a deep V in the middle of his forehead. His screams and cries would haunt Kate for months, but Vivian thrived in chaos. She turned and asked Kate, "Kate, honey, hand me that mirror," and she pointed to the dresser.

Kate gave her the mirror, Vivian held it in front of Kevin, and said, "Look," she positioned the mirror. "This is what your life has come to."

Vivian walked back to the bathroom and washed her knife and hands off. She looked at herself in the mirror, then went back and casually got dressed. Kate had no words to describe her experience. Kate didn't see what Vivian did to Keith, but she stepped into the room just as Vivian stabbed Kevin. She stood at the door and watched Vivian work from behind. Even naked,

stooping over a bloody body, Vivian looked amazingly in control, and after hearing her words to Kevin as he died, Kate believed she was sent by greater glory to do the hard things in life that mere humans couldn't do.

Kate asked her, "Are you ok?"

Vivian smile, "Yes dear, of course. Why do you ask?"

"We did the right thing, didn't we?"

"I only wish we could have stopped them sooner. How many victims are too many? At least there won't be any more in their future, for these two."

They gathered their stuff, walked out, and set the alarm. It took less than fifteen minutes from the time the boys came home, to the minute Kate and Vivian drove off, leaving them to rot on that bedroom floor.

They would drive all the way back to New Orleans that night. They discussed Vivian's plan to fake her death, get a big payday from the government, and start a new life elsewhere.

On the way home, Vivian called Frank. "Hi Frankie, I'm on the way back to New Orleans, I didn't interrupt anything, did I?"

"No, baby, I'm chilling with Leilani, did you know she sings?"

"Yeah."

Frank asked, "How's it going?"

Vivian really didn't want to talk to him, she felt she needed to, that she owed him that much. At one point, she thought that she would spend the rest of her life with him, but deep down knew he couldn't replace Sadie, neither could Kate. Vivian felt Frank deserved a chance to find someone that he could spend the rest of his life with. "It's going alright, still got a couple of jobs to do, just wanted to hear your voice." All the while she talked, she knew that she would never see him again. He thought she was coming back, and she couldn't tell him. The heartfelt sorrow Kate

felt as she overheard their conversation brought tears to her eyes, but she refrained from saying anything.

She hung up the phone and wept softly to herself. Kate saw Vivian's tears and that was an extremely powerful moment. Vivian had nerves of steel when it came to dispatching scum, but for all the goodness in life she couldn't love enough. It made Kate pull off the road to hold Vivian and comfort her. Kate knew Vivian just lost another love, and that pain is crippling.

She composed herself and thanked Kate for her support. They later pulled into a Walmart in Slidell at four-thirty for Vivian to obtain a pregnancy kit. She slipped off to the restroom. When she came out, she had her answer. "It's positive. I'm pregnant. Damn it!" she shouted."

Kate tried to console her, "It'll be all right."

"Now I'm scared. I wasn't scared when Carmelo came at me with a knife, I wasn't scared when I was in the devil's den down in Venezuela, I wasn't scared when thugs shot at me and hit my sweet Sadie, but this scares me. I'm not a mother, oh Kate, what am I going to do?"

"Sweetheart, you have a couple options, you can abort, you can deliver and put it up for adoption, or deliver and dedicate your life to it."

Vivian has obviously thought about it some, but she never heard it put quite like that. 'Dedicate your life to it.' That sounded like something you need a conviction for. She was desperately wanting to get out of one conviction, perhaps this conviction was meant to replace it. Maybe it takes this special kind of bond to change a person's life around. Maybe having a child to dedicate her life to was the reward for all the dedication she gave to her mission of justice.

By now, there was no other alternative, Vivian wanted a deal with the government that would allow her to disappear forever.

For the next six days Vivian procrastinated with regard to planning the next two cases that Kate had lined up. Both were in New Orleans, right at home, in familiar territory, but Vivian couldn't think about it. The only thing on her mind was being pregnant. She feared being a mother, afraid of failure, scared that her actions could or would ruin a child's life. Having a baby was never in her cards and anguishing over an abortion was equally troubling. Vivian wasn't religious, but deep down, she believed in karma. This baby may be the life she was meant to save and sacrifice for. She was confused, and that was something she hadn't felt deeply, since she was twelve.

She also anguished over Frank, he was a good man, he deserved to know, but she knew, she wasn't capable of a normal life, and he would have a greater chance at happiness not knowing. It suddenly hit her, her hormones were whacked and that was flooding her mind with all this emotional distress. She really wanted a drink, but until she was sure of what she was going to do, she promised herself to abstain from alcohol.

Kate came knocking, after Vivian failed to answer her phone all morning. "What's going on Vee? I've been trying to call you all morning."

"Sorry, Kate, I'm in a funk and didn't want to talk to anyone, so I turned my phone off."

"What's the matter," Kate said, genuinely concerned.

"I don't want to do this anymore."

Kate was confused, "Do what anymore?" She was afraid Vivian might be referring to life. She'd never seen Vivian so distraught, and the thoughts of suicide often enter a depressed person's mind.

"I'm tired of killing. Haven't I done enough. If society hasn't done enough to curb the violence by now, why should I continue this crusade?"

"Oh, thank God. I was afraid you were talking about something else. Look, if you don't want to do these jobs, I



understand. We should be thinking about your health anyway.” Kate turned out to be a good person to talk with and Vivian took advantage.

Sasha and Tanya had been bickering for the past three days. Tanya was a couple of years younger than Sasha and never really grew up. She was missing the nightlife. Sasha on the other hand, was being the big sisterly type and noticed Vivian acting very quiet and reserved. That was not at all what her normal personality would be. Vivian was always lively. Sasha entered the living room where Kate and Vivian were discussing, not doing any more jobs.

She walked in and sat next to Vivian and put her hand on her knee. “Are you ok, baby?”

Vivian put her hand on Sasha’s and replied, “I’m fine, never better.”

Sasha said, “Baby, I’ve known you fourteen years and you’ve never gone a half day without talking to someone. What’s wrong?”

Vivian looked at her, knowing she had to say something, Sasha wasn’t the type to just go away, “Alright, I’m just feeling a little blue because of Frank.” Vivian gave Kate a sneer, as if to say, don’t say a word.

Tanya mentioned the club again and Sasha begged, “Tanya, please, can we talk about the club later.” Then reengaged Vivian. “Are you going to retire?”

“Yes, I believe I am. I’ve had enough and life is too short to always be working.”

“That’s good Vee, you deserve a break. You’ve been carrying that cross for far too long anyway. But what about Frank? Why did you leave?”

“It was going to end in a broken heart, mine and his. I can’t deal with that again and Frank doesn’t deserve it either.”

Sasha knew there was no way to influence Vivian with regard to relationships, and accepted Vivian explanation. Kate

knew that that story wouldn't last long when Vivian started to show.

Tanya got a glimpse of the conversation and asked, "Why can't me and Sasha do this job?"

Sasha turned and looked at her like she was crazy. "Girl you wouldn't know what end of the knife to hold. Don't be a fool." Sasha was wise, she knew neither of them had the nerve, guts, or commitment to take someone's life in cold blood. That was a talent for someone with no conscience. Sasha didn't have to hide that concept from Vivian, Vivian knew all too well her clinical diagnosis and condition, and she was ok with it. Tanya, on the other hand, was young and full of vigor. If she were a boy, she'd probably be dead by now for doing something stupid.

Tanya took offense to Sasha's quip and started to raise her voice. Vivian shouted in a controlled voice, "Hey, knock it off. It's over for now. I want to set up one last job, something that can get us out of this game for good and paid at the same time. There is a lot of stuff to work out."

Tanya spoke, "I'm sorry Vee, Sasha's been a butt, that's all."

"Kate and I have a lot of money things to discuss within the next few days so if you see me staying away, I'm not trying to be rude, I'm just trying to take care of business. Tanya, you should go out, go get laid girl, maybe it'll calm you down."

Sasha laughed out loud.

After that weird exchange, Kate said, "Now, for the real reason I was calling you, that Martin fellow called me, it appears there may be the opportunity we're looking for, out in Aspen."

"Aspen? Kate, dear, you know I hate the cold."

Kate laughed, "I know you're tougher than that. I have faith in you."

Sasha snickered and Vivian cynically told Sasha, "Shut up."

“I told him you had a list of demands and he’d have to talk to you in person.”

Vivian said, “Good work, when do we meet?”

“He said he’d be in touch.”

Vivian didn’t like hearing that, “Well, I don’t want to wait on him, can you move half the money I have in the Hawaii account back to Veronica’s account, and the other half back here in the shelter’s account.”

Kate reminded Vivian, “You still have to decide on the official name of the nonprofit.”

“I know, just go with The Angel House.”

Sasha said, “I love that.”

Vivian moving two million dollars back to her Veronica’s name should have been a clue to anyone that knew Vivian, who was her go to name far from the antics of Vanessa or Vivian. Having the shelter and exorbitant legal fees was a good way for her to hide her income, and the payoff from the government would be hidden in those contributions as well.

Vivian had to wait to be alone with Kate again to discuss the most personal and private demands. When all this was over, she would have to say goodbye to everyone, absolutely everyone except Kate, and that thought had weighed very heavily on her shoulders. The whole time she conversed with Sasha and Tanya knowing she was going to have to pull a Houdini was torture. She loved them, but if anyone knew she was still alive, no one would be safe. Only when Vivian is dead will their lives be safe and meaningful again.

There was so much personal planning involved Vivian was afraid she’d forget a major part and after the execution of the plan, there wouldn’t be any going back.

## Chapter Twelve

The sun hadn't yet broken when Kate got up to make coffee the following morning. She had stayed the night to discuss Vivian's plan to escape to the Bahamas, or down around the Keys, someplace sunny. She wore a set of Vivian's silk pajamas through the house on her way to the kitchen. She entered the kitchen and was startled to see Martin sitting at the table drinking a cup of coffee all by himself in the dark.

Kate belted out, "I don't have to ask how you got in, do I?"

"Just keeping in practice, relax," he said. "We've got a short window; can we talk about this job?"

Kate said, "You can't believe how lucky you are that Vivian's a morning person. Where was the courtesy call?"

Martin was single, in his fifties, never married, forever lonely, and he saw something in Kate he couldn't resist. "I made coffee," he said with a big smile.

"Yeah, pour me a cup, I'll go get Vivian. She turned as he was asking how she wanted her coffee and she sarcastically questioned, "Black, the stronger the better. Vivian had quite a night."

Moments later, Vivian came out of her room and walked through the kitchen in nothing but her panties. She walked past Martin to the coffee machine and asked, "What brings you around Marty?"

"I wish you'd stop calling me Marty."

Vivian turned inward to the fire in her soul to say straight to his face, "Well, I wish you'd stop sneaking up on us, you wouldn't want me to sneak up on you, would you?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, no. I live in a shady world, I'll try to do better."

"So, what do you have?"

Martin was intimidated by Vivian's attire and asked, "Vee, would you mind putting something on?"

Vivian chuckled and winked at Kate, then bounced her breasts back and forth, "Kind of hard to concentrate, isn't it?" Vivian laughed, "That's why you're the weaker sex."

Martin may have been shy, but he was not without a sense of humor. He replied, "From where I'm sitting, I'm ok with that."

She agreed and put on an LSU Tiger's sweatshirt, but still lounged around in panties. They talked about Judge Raymond King, a federal appeals court judge who was running for Senator for the state of Colorado. Martin began his brief, "For every reason, this judge has got to go. The story will be that he had sexual relations with minors and the Vigilante killer enacted revenge. We fake your death. The crime is solved, the killer dead, case closed on Vivian Bouvier, and Vanessa Wakefield. There is a problem though. The bureau doesn't like the idea of your reporter writing a book. That isn't going to happen."

"You don't have to worry about him, I've got video showing him participating, that's life in any state. You have all the cards, let him write it, but censor the shit out of it if you want. I just want Sadie's story published, she was before the agency, her story is about me."

"I'll tell you what, we'll talk to your man, and if we believe he'll play ball, we'll give him chance and let him write it, but we will read it carefully to make sure it matches our narrative. We know there will be many stories told, it serves us well to have one tell it the way we see it."

"That's your business, just let Sadie's words be Read."

Vivian put her hand out to shake. "Deal. Just let be break it to him."

He said, "Deal."

Vivian saw how Martin was looking at Kate and smiled. She rose from the table with her coffee cup and stepped behind Kate. She bent down behind her and put her face beside Kate's

face and looked at Martin. Vivian whispered in Kates's ear, "He's studying every wrinkle in your brow. Is something happening?"

Kate realized she was right. Martin was daydreaming and Kate caught his eye trying to refocus after being caught staring. Vivian smiled at Martin, "Well Martin, I must say, you have good taste in women, and your coffee's weak."

Vivian got another cup of coffee and asked Martin, "I know you do this for a living, but this sounds like it's going to take a lot of people to pull this off."

"It will," he said. "But we employ more people than Walmart."

"No doubt."

"Actually, we're only going to need two agents, a man, and a woman, to be uniformed police officers, a paramedic, an ambulance driver, which would be me, and a doctor. We'll steal the ambulance and cop cars, piece of cake, we do it all the time."

"Really?"

"No, it just sounded good. It'll be fine. We have experts that will make this better than TV."

That was less encouraging for Kate than the jitters of taking out a sitting judge running for office. A clear-cut capital crime and yet the government could engage in it with no remorse or hesitation whatsoever. That was so much worse than anything Vivian could have done.

Kate looked at Martin, "Put your eyes back in your head, the only way you're seeing this, is in your dreams."

Martin acted a little shocked and asked Vivian, "What did I say?"

Vivian responded, "You're not supposed to like killing people, it's supposed to be a matter of duty, you screwed up and let it show." Vivian looked at him and shook her head yes, "Sorry Martin, you blew it. What a shame, she was worth it too. Trust me, I know," then she winked at him.

By now, Martin was feeling psychologically screwed. “Damn,” he said. “Kate, would it help if you knew this judge let over one hundred hardened criminals out of jail because they didn’t have the funds to pay the guards, they did have the funds because that same judge ruled in a suit against that prison for not providing gender reassignment services at the taxpayer’s expense. How stupid was that? Now the hardened criminals are loose, the transgenders are still in prison, and they still don’t have services, because the suit costs too much. The only winners were the lawyers and the criminals.”

“Well, yes it would, except, I was a lawyer once and I can tell you not all lawyers are greedy. This is all just a political hit, stop trying to justify it. I understand Vivian’s importance more than you realize. You need her backdrop. You need a villain, a scape goat, and whether Vivian supposedly does this because he’s a pedophile, or for crippling transgender’s rights, or whatever, you need her. She has a few demands of her own. Go ahead Vee.”

Martin felt the last chance to get to know Kate a little better faded quickly. Vivian went on to say, “We can call it legal fee, but the judge is worth two million, not a penny less. Sadie’s book gets published; I go away forever.”

Martin said, “Ah, now the money comes up.”

Vivian said, “Don’t be an ass. It’s not about the money, it’s about disappearing and disappearing cost money. Two million dollars to be exact, in an account Kate gives you, before I pull the trigger.”

“Agreed,” he said.

Kate asked, “So, why the hurry?”

He replied, “Timing is an optic. People have short memories and if too much time passes, they lose interest. Now is the perfect time.”

Martin asked if they wanted him to make another pot of coffee and they both said, “No!”

Vivian could hear rustling going on down the hall. “Quiet,” she said. “No one, not even Sasha and Tanya, can know about this. As far as they’re concerned, it’s just a job, I’ll do it alone, there, and back, no big deal. Got it?”

“Absolutely.”

Sasha entered the kitchen, “What’s going on here? A party at six in the morning?”

Vivian said, “Just a job baby, enough to keep the shelter running for quite a while.”

Sasha said, “Good, I didn’t save enough to keep things going myself.”

Martin gave Vivian a cell phone and a plane ticket to Aspen Colorado, “I’ll meet you when you land.” He then stood up and said, “I’d love to stay, but we’re burning daylight.”

Sasha thought that an odd statement sounded like something Vivian would have said, fourteen years ago. “So, you’re going to Aspen, in November. Wow, this must be an important job.”

Vivian admitted, “It is. It’s enough for me to cancel these last two local jobs.” The whole time she talked with Sasha, she repeatedly looked back at Kate to make sure she understood her wishes to maintain secrecy. “I’ve spent too much and if I’m going to keep the shelter open and hop around the country, I need more money. It’s a cash cow. Yeah, I hate the cold, but you have to admit, it’s gorgeous country. Who knows, maybe I’ll stay and take skiing lessons.”

Sasha laughed out loud, “I’d pay to see you in the snow.”

They laughed for a while then Sasha went back to her room. Vivian told Kate, “We only have today, in the morning I’ll be on my way to hell. Power of attorney is still good, right?”

“Yes.”

“The two million goes to you as legal fees, combined the two million in the shelter’s trust, take care of my mom, Sasha, and Tanya. I need you to act as executor, hopefully the



government doesn't take out Randall till he gets the book published. Tell him to honor Sadie's words. Break it to Frank gently." Suddenly Vivian began to feel a little separation anxiety. Thinking about saying goodbye to her dearest friends and family forever was almost as sad as saying goodbye to Sadie.

For the remainder of the day, the four girls hung around the house and told stories of Vivian's exploits. Kate learned more about Vivian's younger self, before Castle Rouge, and the mayhem that followed her return to the states. Kate was reminded of her own daughter, and how Jazmine and Debbie were a lot like Sasha and Vivian. Vivian only had a few hours to cover fourteen years of friendship.

Much of the conversation seemed perfectly innocent until Sasha noticed Vivian wasn't drinking bourbon. "What are you drinking?" Sasha asked.

"Iced tea."

"Iced tea? You're not going through rehab, are you?"

Vivian laughed and replied, "Hell no, I just like a glass of iced tea from time to time." Sasha could argue it, but she had a knack for spotting subtle differences in people's behavior and this was definitely a bourbon moment. Vivian changed the subject by suggesting she didn't have anything to wear.

Tanya was a late comer to the conversation, hell, she was a late comer to any conversation, but she adjusted ok, "Your best bet is to shop when you get there. You ain't going to find any ski clothes here. By the way, who's going with you?"

"Good question," Sasha said. "We'll girl, are you going to tell her, or am I?"

Tanya asked, "What?"

Sasha replied, "She's going alone. First, she leaves us in Hattiesburg, runs off with Kate, now she's not even taking Kate."

Kate knew the whole story but could say anything. It was hard for her to keep this secret, but she had to, not only was it the

legal thing to do as her attorney, but as a friend, knowing how much pain Vivian was willing to accept to keep her friends safe.

Vivian addressed it herself, “Look, I’m not replacing you. You are my posse, my entourage, my compadres, but this show is being run by a bunch of fools. I’m not in charge of these ops, which makes it impossible for me to ensure your safety. I don’t trust these government types with my own safety, there’s no way I’ll trust them with yours. The plan we have is a good plan, but it requires me to be quick and alone. I’ll make it up to you.”

It wasn’t much consultation, but that wasn’t entirely out of the norm for Vivian either. Vivian realized she had just lied to Sasha and had to suck it up. She tried to change the subject again, “Do you remember the look on Antonio’s face when he recognized me?” Now that was a real O face.” They both burst into laughter.

Her flight was on time and so was Martin. He met her at the arrival terminal, and she reminded him she needed to shop for clothes. He took her to a sporting goods shop downtown where the prices were double. At least she didn’t wait and shop at the lodge and pay triple. “Twenty-eight hundred dollars for a jacket? Martin complained.

“Oh, quit your belly aching, you’re not paying for it.”

“Oh, in that case, you should get two.”

“Martin, you’re funny, I don’t know why Kate couldn’t see that, except for the fact that you’re an ass. Vivian was being as cynical and sarcastic as he was, in a twisted plot of hazing foreplay.

Martin mentioned, “You know we’re going to have to blast blood packets in that thing?”

“I know, but if I’m going to leave an everlasting visual impression on someone, it’ll be in style.”

“I can see that.”

Vivian asked, “Now, where is this going down?”

Martin took out a small notebook from his jacket pocket, “He’s going to be having lunch with his wife and the aide to Senator Henley, the retiring Senator that King hopes to succeed, in the Hotel Jerome at noon. You’ll be sitting a couple tables down and when you’re ready, you walk up, stab him in the neck and continue walking. We’ll have two uniformed police, confront you and shoot you three times in the back, with blanks, of course, and activate the blood pack discharges remotely. You’ll feel it, but it won’t hurt. When you do, drop to the ground, and remain as still as you can. Just like in the movies play dead, maybe do a little moaning.”

“Sounds easy enough,” Vivian said, “Walk up, stab, stab, walk away, bang, bang, I go down.”

Martin said, “Sorry Vee, you got me that time, I couldn’t tell if you were being sarcastic or not.”

“Did you think I was?”

“Now I do.”

Vivian admitted, “Kate may be a little less tolerant, but I kind of like messing with you.”

“I could tell, but I have to admit, yesterday morning was a treat.”

Vivian snickered, “I knew you were a horny devil. I’ll tell you what, if this thing goes off without a glitch, maybe I’ll give you a lap dance.”

“Wow, I’ll do my best.”

“Yeah, you better.”

The plan was set, the time had come, Vivian arrived at the lodge at a quarter till noon and assumed her reservation for one. She ordered a cup of coffee and sat at her table, indiscreetly canvassed the room for her team, and sat gracefully alone. A pair of Aspen city police, a man and woman, sat about three tables away eating a grilled sandwich of some sort. Vivian figured they had to be Martin’s cops, which was confirmed when one of them winked at Vivian.

The judge, his wife, and the senator's aide all arrived together and took their reserved table. As soon as they showed up, Vivian text messaged Kate, asking her to verify whether the deposit was made into the shelter's account. She then texted Martin to let him know she'd walk away if the deposit didn't show. Within five minutes Kate replied that the deposit was made, now Vivian was on the hook to deliver and shifted all her attention to the judge's table. She waited patiently hoping his wife might get up to use the restroom. She looked innocent, and having her husband killed in front of her seemed cruel and was unnecessary. If she could spare the woman the gruesome sight, she would. Vivian looked down and noticed her beautiful white, mink jacket and realized the judge's wife was wearing white as well. Drinking red wine in a white dress was pretty bold.

Vivian looked at the two cops to ensure they were paying attention and stood from her table. She walked toward the restroom, accidentally bumping into the judge's table as she rounded the corner, just as Mrs. King's glass touched her lips. She spilled a little wine on her white dress and as predicted jumped back to minimize the damage. Of course, Vivian vehemently apologized and tried to help clean up the mess. She had her knife tucked into the napkin that she carried in her left hand, her purse draped over her left shoulder, and as the judge's wife cleared the turn toward the restroom, Vivian struck quickly and decisively. The table was already in a state of calamity, and just one second separated the judge from life and death. Vivian thrust her knife into his neck, severing his carotid artery and casually yet swiftly walked away. One second was all it took; it took longer for the senator's aide to fully grasp what had just happened.

The aide screamed out, "Assassin!"

The screams startled everyone in the vicinity, including especially the two cops having lunch. One hollered freeze while the other simply fired three shots at Vivian. They were blanks and with the help of the remote control, the other cop triggered the

jacket's explosive charges. Vivian fell to the ground, leaving what looked to be a pint of blood oozing from her beautiful white jacket.

Vivian wasn't aware that only one of the cops had blanks. The other had live rounds in case of mission failure or if Vivian were to back out of the deal. She would never know how close to being setup and killed she was.

The judge's wife was spared the gruesome sight of her husband choking to death on his own blood. He lost consciousness within a few seconds from lack of blood to the brain and death was guaranteed. By now, the entire lodge was engulfed with chaos. Gunfire in the room made it panic central for all the vacationing spectators. While one of the cops took a few pictures with her phone, the other kept everyone clear of the scene. The female cop ran to the judge's aid, but in reality, her function was to verify that he was terminated.

The male cop reported the incident over his radio loud enough for all to hear and stood guard over Vivian. Martin could be heard replying, "Unit four seven, shots fired at Hotel Jerome, send back up and an ambulance."

"Make it two ambulances," the offer said. With all the chaos, no one noticed that the cops didn't use traditional police codes to report the incident or questioned why they shot the suspect in the back. It would add the list of questions that the witnesses wouldn't be able to focus on or clarify.

Martin drove up to the front of the lodge and with his paramedic, grabbed a gurney and entered the lodge. Everything happened so fast, the patrons hadn't a clue as to the timeline that was being played. As soon as they arrived, the policewoman told the Martin, "The other casualty is over here, neck wound, he didn't make it. Officer Downs is with the perpetrator, female, late twenties, three gunshot wounds, she's still alive. They made their determination to try and save the one they could and attended to Vivian. They loaded her into the ambulance and waited for the

real ambulance to show. It didn't take long for the real sirens to be heard coming up the hill. The two police, Martin, and his paramedic all climbed into the ambulance with Vivian and drove away. Only seconds separated their departure from the arrival of the real police and ambulance, who at this point, had their work cut out for them trying to figure out what was going on. People everywhere were shaken up, none more so than Mrs. King. She returned to the table in utter chaos and screamed and cried hysterically.

Bystanders gave reports of the cops that shot the woman, how the judge was stabbed, and how the ambulance took the woman away. The stolen police cruiser was left in front of the lodge with the lights flashing, but no trace of the police that left it there.

It was twenty-two minutes before a detective showed up to the lodge to question the local police about their missing suspect. "Gentlemen, a sitting judge was just assassinated, and you let the perpetrator go. Where's my perpetrator?" he shouted.

They were stunned. They weren't sure what he was suggesting, "There was nobody here when we got here, but there were clearly two cops and an ambulance. We assumed they had the lead on this, being first on scene.

The detective was furious. He called to the station, "The perpetrator has been taken to the hospital, find out which one."

They reported back, "We only dispatched one ambulance and it's still on the scene."

"Holy shit," the detective said, "What else could go wrong."

He questioned the senator's aide who told him, "She was like ghost, here one second, gone the next. All I remember is seeing her walk away. Is it true, was it the vigilante killer?"

"Why would you say that?"

The senator's aide said, "Rumor had it that when criminals were released due to overcrowding, the vigilante killer vowed revenge."

"Where did you hear that?"

"It's a rumor. Nobody knows where they start."

When Martin drove away, he essentially had his whole crew with him. About a mile down the road, they stopped on the side of the road, where a U.S. Marshal met up with them to take Vivian into witness protection. The rest of the team drove straight to the Aspen Valley Hospital where they backed up into the receiving area without lights or siren and abandoned the ambulance near the emergency room. They got into Martin's ford and disappeared into the night.

For the rest of the day and night, the Aspen police had their hands full trying to figure out what had happened. With all the misinformation and questions surrounding the scene, sparks flew wildly in the precinct until they received that dreaded call from the FBI. Due to the suspect being the notorious vigilante killer, the FBI had to be notified but of course, they were part of the scam and the APD was their new scapegoat."

Over the next couple of days, pieces of the puzzle all started to filter in and fill the plot. A doctor claimed to receive the body mere minutes before the judge's body arrived DOA at Aspen Valley Hospital, though no one could recall the body arriving. The abandoned ambulance gave some credence that activity had taken place, as well as records indicating Vivian had been declared DOA. Further documents indicated that she was taken from the hospital's morgue in the middle of the night and delivered to the county coroner along with the judge. Inside the hospital morgue, Vivian's toe tag and Jane Doe #2's were switched. During the same time, records at the crematorium were being manufactured to indicate a Jane Doe being cremated that day, that information wouldn't be known for two days adding to the mystery. A week after the fact, was a long time to go after

having lost a body and a report that a Jane Doe was cremated the day after the stabbing, created a whole new level of conspiracy theories.

Reports leaked to the press suggested Vivian was positively identified as the vigilante killer and had in fact been shot dead in the altercation. The judge was supposedly a target for his radical criminal justice reform, the rumors of pedophilia were ignored but the results were the same. The Aspen Police Department had a mess on their hands. An assassination, the death of the most prolific female serial killer in the nation's history comes up missing and presumed cremated. Many questions would remain unanswered, like who called 911, who took the pictures, how did the cop car get there and who were the two cops on the scene. How did two ambulances show when only one was dispatched? It became so ugly, the department had to concede their incompetence. As far as the FBI was concerned, they had accomplished their mission. The judge was dead, Vivian took the fall, her death certificate freed her from a gruesome history but banished her from everyone she knew.

The county coroner wasn't yet aware that the body he had wasn't that of Vivian, but an unidentified drug overdose victim that had been in the hospital's morgue for two days. Ms. Baxter arrived to identify the body and was totally beside herself with grief, but seeing someone other than Vivian at the table increased her anxiety for not knowing what happened to Vivian. Then, a sliver of a chance that she was still alive crept into Ms. Baxter's mind. She left the coroner's office crying but secretly hopeful she was ok. The coroner was upset to say the least. He had a Jane Doe with Vivian's toe tag, he had a doctor signing a death certificate before he had a chance to examine a body, a body that can't be found, and he had a mysterious cremation that may have been his missing body.

The press was eating it all up.



It was Randall that drove Ms. Baxter to the coroner's office, and in the back of his mind, he had a million questions. As an investigative journalist, he felt the need to dig into all these irregularities. However, Martin was waiting for them when they got home. He waited in his car outside Ms. Baxter's until they returned. He called Randall on his cell. "Mr. Wade, my name is Martin, I have information about Vivian, come outside, I'm in the black crown vic."

Randall questioned receiving the mysterious phone call but went along out of sheer curiosity. He opened the door and sat in the passenger seat. "What do you know?"

Martin told him, "I know you were part of a hit team that took out a fella in Hattiesburg about a week ago."

"Who are you?" he asked nervously.

"Let's just say I am the United States Government, and I have video evidence of your participation in the cold-blooded murder of a man named Michael Fiske."

Randall wanted, and tried to deny it, but Martin shut him down right away. "Before Vivian, or Vanessa, got herself killed, she was afraid of you destroying her legacy or her girlfriend's memory, and captured this video. It was sent to me upon her death. What you don't know is, her death gives us a chance to help make changes to the system. There's just one problem, you. About twenty years ago, people just seemed to vanish without a trace, you would have been one of those people."

"I don't understand," he said.

"I'm going to cut to the chase, you're looking at life in prison without parole, in a federal penitentiary; and that's the good choice. You have knowledge of things we don't want the public to know. Personally, I kind of like the old way, but the country need's its secrets, just as people need theirs."

With subtle sarcasm, Randall asked, "I'd have handcuffs on if you were arresting me, so, what are you suggesting?"

Martin said, “Not suggesting, proposing. We propose you finish your book, we look it over, make any changes or deletions for national security, and everyone’s happy. But and this is the part you cannot overlook, if you divulge such secrets, your history changes dramatically, apocalyptic kind of dramatically. You understand what I’m saying, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do, I’ve heard Vivian say something similar. It may be in my best interest not to write the damn thing at all.”

Martin told him, “Don’t worry about it, write it, make it good, make her a hero, make her a villain, just don’t implicate the government, can you do that?”

Randall asked, “So, what happened to Vivian?”

“Haven’t you seen the news, Vivian’s dead. We aim to keep it that way.”

Randall said, “It won’t stop her spirit. She’s made a mark on society and things are changing, alive or dead.”

Martin smiled at him, which was something he never does, and told him, “We know, and we’re counting on it. Truth be told, we loved her at the bureau, she was doing what needed to be done, something we couldn’t do. Whether right or wrong, the system needed to change, and Vivian was the answer. My advice, turn Vivian into a legend.”

That was a conversation Randall could not have dreamed of. He knew this was his golden ticket. All he had to do was control the narrative of the book. Unfortunately for him, that meant using a lot more of Sadie’s anecdotes and witticisms, and less of his sensationalism. It wasn’t a hard choice; you can’t put a price on freedom until it’s threatened to be taken away. “I’ll make her a goddess,” he said.

Martin said, “That’s the spirit. Go home and leave Ms. Baxter be, she looks beat.”

Randall looked through the windshield at the house to see what Martin could be referring to and clearly noticed it was too dark to see. “Right,” he said, while exiting the car.

Martin reminded him, “We’ll be watching, do the right thing.”

Randall went back to Ms. Baxter’s house and left shortly thereafter.

Martin reflected on all the lives that Vivian was separating herself from, obviously not because she didn’t want them in her life, but he understood leaving someone for their own good.

## Chapter Thirteen

Kate waited four hours after the story of Vivian's death hit the evening news before calling Frank. Even though she felt he should have already known, she wanted to be the one to confirm it and try to ease his pain. "Mr. Miller, I'm sorry, have you seen the news?"

"I have, is it true. Did they kill her?"

Kate hated to lie to him, and technically she really didn't know for sure, so she confirmed the reports instead. She knew the pain of loss all too well, and not knowing for sure was torture. These were the anticipated dark days Martin warned about. The time immediately following the incident until her memory fades into history. The next few months were to be a total silence and blackout period where Vivian could establish and begin a new identity, a new beginning. Kate spoke to Frank in terms of love and faith and praised her commitment to her cause. "I can't say for sure, but the best reports from the FBI say she was killed. I can tell you; she went to Aspen to do a job, the pictures in the news look like her, and I haven't heard from her. If she got away, I believe she would have called me. I haven't heard from her and that gives me the feeling the reports are probably true."

Frank felt so guilty. He believed now that when Vivian left, she wasn't planning on coming back, that somehow, she knew it would end this way. He felt her withdraw and become a little more distant leading up to her departure. Her pressing work became more important than the inner personal journey they were enjoying together. All he could think about was Vivian the tigress, always on the hunt. She stunned him and scared him; she wowed him with wonder. She left on that mission alone because she knew it was dangerous and wanted to protect the ones she loved. Kate said nothing about the pregnancy and as promised, she never would.

They shared some of their best memories of Vivian and before Kate said goodbye, she had one last task to share with Frank. “Frank, Vivian left a note for you with me before she left for Aspen in case something happens to her. That’s why I waited so long to call, but I think I it may be warranted now.”

She carefully opened the envelope and began to read the note. *“My dearest Frank, if you are reading this, you will have already found out that I am gone. I knew all along that this day may come, and it was selfish of me to include you in my pain. I have been fortunate to have been in love more than once, and the love I’ve experienced has been my only redeemable reward. Unfortunately, my love required other’s pain, and for that I am sorry. I’m with Sadie now, but please know, that if life had second chances, I’d have your baby and love you forever. I feared for you, and I cried for you, I never meant to hurt you, but the price of love is nonnegotiable. My fate was my cross to bear, and that fate was sealed years before we met. I pray you forgive me and find happiness. Love Vee.”*

They both cried.

For months following Vivian’s death, Frank mulled around the cabana, rarely took jobs, and drank more than usual. He was obviously taking it a little harder than portrayed. Leilani and her family all felt close to Vivian, they learned of Vivian’s alter life in the news along with everyone on the island, but they knew her for the heart of gold she had toward good people. They supported Frank in his most difficult times before he began to adjust.

Kate had her hands full with Vivian’s estate and all the court filings she needed to keep the shelter operational. She also had Sasha and Tanya to consider. Vivian had many wishes for Kate to privately consider. She allowed her to use her best judgement, and one of those was a scholarship for Jasmine. Vivian knew that Kate adopted a secret attachment to her baby daughter’s best friend and wanting to see her succeed was a

guarantee. Vivian was right. Kate reflected that for someone as cold at justice, Vivian's compassion outshined her darkest deeds. Kate was up to the legal challenges, but it was the personal stories each of her friends had, that made keeping her secret her cross to bear. A small price to pay for having loved her.

For weeks, the news of Vivian's death remained in the headlines. Everybody had a story to tell, and statistics filled the talk show circuit. From the Florida panhandle to Kentucky, from Atlanta to El Paso, violent crime had dropped on average thirty percent. For a brief time in history, criminals were afraid to commit crimes. The Dallas Morning News had an article addressing how many criminals are released across the country on technicalities and it shocked the public to know that there was more money in protecting the system itself, than there was protecting the people. The courts have been bought and it took someone like Vivian to challenge it.

One article after another tried to sway public opinion, until state legislatures began examining their protocols and enacting new legislation accordingly.

Sasha and Tanya had a difficult time accepting that Vivian was dead, and an even more difficult time accepting being left out of the last mission. They saw the pictures, but they've also seen Vivian in makeup. They knew not to trust their eyes, but they had nothing to go on. Sasha told Tanya sharply, "I ain't putting nothing past the government, they may have her locked up in some Mexican jail or something. Otherwise, where did her body go."

Tanya went along, as she always has, but she added a thought, "Did you see those pictures on TV?"

"Yeah, so?" Sasha asked.

"The next time you see it, look at Vivian's left hand. The first couple times they showed her picture, she was lying on her belly with her head to the side and her left hand by her side looked

like she was pointing her middle finger. The later pictures photoshopped it or something, it ain't there anymore."

"I know, it's crazy. Something's going on."

Violent criminals and sexual deviates sighed a huge sigh of relief upon learning of Vivian's death but were faced with a new challenge, there were now 10,000 Vivian's out there.

Some of the best rumors started right there at home. Sasha and Tanya started one of their own. In a crowded bar, after many drinks, Sasha argued with a man about Vivian. She claimed the government faked her death and is keeping her locked up in the dungeons of a maximum-security prison in Colorado. She was a ghost prisoner never meant to be seen or heard of again.

Another rumor was she got away and is still out in the streets doing her thing. At this point, anybody could be Vivian, and maybe, Vivian was in everyone.

Shortly after the event, and during the height of confusion, Vivian's escort, U.S. Marshal John Cooley had his hands full with Vivian. His job was to indoctrinate Vivian into the witness protection program, in a rare, modified capacity. Vivian refused to let them determine her occupation or identity. "I've already got an identity. If I take yours, you'll own me. Forget that, I'll go it alone."

John was like a character out of a Luis Lamour novel, brazen but in a gentlemanly way. He was a cowboy at heart and dressed like it. It also didn't hurt that he was a big boy. Vivian joked with him about being a rough and rugged kind of man and he seemed to eat it up, but that didn't help his negotiations with the guidelines of the program.

"Look, John, if you want to help, find me a nice neighborhood, in a good school district and make it warm, I don't like the cold. Let me worry about my name and what kind of work I'll be doing."

He talked with his superiors and for the first time in his career, he witnessed the Justice Department cave to a client's

demands. He heard of Vivian, as did everyone, but couldn't have conceived her influence over the bureau or agency until he dealt with her directly. Within days of the extraction, and before the claustrophobia of a safe house made her mad, they found Vivian a home in Savannah Georgia, not quite the Bahamas, but she'll take it.

She chose to keep Veronica Caine as her identity mostly because she didn't trust the system. John continued to circle back to requirements and procedures, protocol, and regulations. Vivian had heard enough. "John, read my lips, I don't need you, I don't want you, I'm only letting you help, because I told Martin I would."

"Who?"

"Never mind."

John found her impossibly desirable and bit his lip when she went off script on personal and sexual small talk. Being a U.S. Marshall or Secret Service Agent were his life's ambition, which he accepted, would require a selfless devotion to duty, but none of his training prepared him to deal with the likes of Vivian.

She asked him questions about his personal life and desires which kept him on the defensive. In every case, he tried to change the subject. He asked her, "If you don't mind, can I ask how you came to be in this position?"

She replied, "I'd rather talk about you. My story was born out of pain and rejection. I had hoped that love could have prevented it all, but that wasn't in the cards."

"I understand the trigger, but why did you continue, you could have stopped anytime you wanted."

Vivian looked at him, thinking he was sounding so innocent and concerned and wondered, could he really be this naïve, or soft. "No honey, I couldn't"

"What kept you going? I'm sorry if I'm prying, but I find it interesting that you were able to maintain such composure in such a deadly game."



She admitted, “You obviously don’t understand obsession. Let me ask you a question. If we were out on the town, having a couple of drinks, I was looking hot, and you were feeling horny, would you force yourself on me and take my virtue?”

“No, of course not.”

“You say that now, like thousands of other men until it happens to them. If you were able to envision taking me by force, then you would know exactly why I continued. The world is not a safe place and with people like that running around infecting society, I don’t understand how anyone would not fight.”

“Fair enough,” he said. “I guess it’s hard to understand what’s going on in a broken mind unless your mind is also broken.”

“Exactly. So, when you ask me why I kept going, I had to say, I couldn’t stop myself.”

“If you couldn’t then, how can you now?”

She replied while lightly rubbing her belly, “Sometimes, you just need the right reason.”

Vivian imagined Georgia in the spring, a memory burned into her from ‘Gone with the Wind.’ She wasn’t prepared for the mediocre like-style of the suburban homemaker. She was a poor Cajun girl with dreams of being a southern belle or French model. Middle class and all things average was never a concept she coveted.

She sat outside at a patio table, covered by a huge umbrella. A pregnant, single mother to be, who, apparently didn’t have to work, laid half naked on her back patio in the middle of the week. The houses were one-hundred-fifty feet apart from each other, like a grid, and children played between the houses when school was out. She wore a two piece, very skimpy, bright yellow swimsuit, and big sunglasses, while kicking back to read a science fiction and drink iced tea. Two boys about fifteen each, who routinely skipped school, were riding their bikes through the easement dragging a stick across the chain link fences. They

slowed down as they approached Vivian's house and witnessed her rubbing cocoa butter on her belly. The boys loved snooping around Vivian's house, and she knew it. She played the game because it was fun.

"Afternoon boys," she said as she pulled her glasses down.

"Hey, Ms. Vee, do you need me to mow your lawn?" one boy asked.

"Billy, you just mowed it two days ago."

"Just asking."

Vivian didn't want to become a 'normal' person, she had too many issues that needed to be addressed. "Billy, you're a boy, it's natural to be curious about girls. Yeah, I'm a sex pot, you have to get over that. Try to imagine, that every time you look at me naked, you see your best friend Kenny looking at you naked."

"That's sick," he shivered.

Vivian laughed, "Yeah, but now you can't unsee it. It's creepy, isn't it?"

Billy replied, "Yes, ma'am."

"Well, that's how we feel when strange men look at us as objects. Be a good boy and just be honest about your desires." She then had to taunt him again, "Hell, if it were up to me, I'd take my swimsuit off right now, but what would the neighbors say?"

She riled him up good. He was extremely embarrassed, but just as excited. Vivian stood up from the table and shouted, "Damn it!" while she was looking down at her belly.

"What's wrong?" Billy asked.

"I can't see my hoo ha," spoken with a straight face.

Billy looked down to her swimsuit instinctively and Vivian said, "That's all you get, now tell Kenny you got a close up, and remember what I said about Kenny seeing you naked."

On a very rare occasion, Vivian's neighbor to the right took a vacation day to sit with his sick daughter. He happened to

step out into his back yard just in time to witness the scene. “Howdy neighbor,” he said while standing with a cup of coffee in his hand.

“Well, howdy back.”

“Beautiful day, isn’t it? I’m Tom.”

Vivian could tell he was shy and swiveled in her chair toward his direction. “Honey, can you come a little closer, so we don’t have to shout.”

He acknowledged his poor manners and stepped into Vivian’s yard to formally introduce himself. “Hi. My name’s Tom, Tom Hansen, this must be our first chance to meet since you moved in a couple months ago.”

Vivian remarked, “Six months. We must be on opposite schedules.”

“No, I’m sorry, it’s me, I’ve been avoiding you.”

“Shame on you Tom. My name is Veronica Caine, my friends call me Vee. I won’t bite. Since you’re being honest, why were you avoiding me?”

Tom told her, “I’m a single parent, my wife passed from cancer two years ago, you’re a beautiful young woman who appears to be single. It’s a broken heart disaster waiting to happen.”

Vivian replied, “I know exactly what you mean, I lost someone too.”

He assumed the father wasn’t in her life out of personal compatibility issues, which made him feel guilty for being judgmental. Then it hit him, that’s probably how other people see him as a single parent. A bond was beginning to form.

Tom told her, “That was pretty funny what you did to that boy.”

She laughed, “Yeah, they’ve been hanging around for quite some time. No offense, but you got to keep an eye on boys, testosterone is an addictive as heroine to a young man.”

“None taken. I remember my wild youth.”

Vivian couldn't imagine this thirtysomething, slightly chunky, specimen in Bermuda shorts chasing tail. "So, how old is your daughter?"

"She just turned ten. Smart as a whip, just like her mom. She's home sick today."

Vivian saw the pain in his face as he referred to his lost love and felt Sadie's beating heart in her chest. "Do you want some tea?"

Vivian made her first move to fit in and integrate into her new life and made friends with the next-door neighbor. Meanwhile, Sasha and Tanya had grieved the best they could. They came to terms that what ever happened to Vivian looked permanent. They renovated the house and opened up some space by taking a wall down here and there. By doing that they were able to add six more beds. The girls staying there idolized Sasha and Tanya for having been so close to Vivian. They too became local legends. The shelter protected the children from their abusive backgrounds and the system at the same time. They taught the girls how to cook and clean, do laundry, and pay bills. Occasionally a baby was born there, and girls learned to be parents. Sasha and Tanya did a great job of giving them back their dignity. Vivian's picture was on nearly every wall as inspiration that you don't have to be a victim, and her sacrifice was worth it.

The biggest changes during those six months have been the progress Randall made on the book. The first half of the book was all Sadie. It was essentially a love story involving desperate circumstances. Randall's second half of the book dealt strictly with the verbosity in which she enacted her revenge. He wanted her character to be betrayed as a great love turned to hate, complete with action and sensationalism. Ironically, it was the government to step in and altered the narrative. After editing the manuscript, the FBI special unit redacted a total of thirty-seven pages worth of story, most involving Kate, and gave it back to Randall with their approval.

Now that Tom had broken the ice with Vivian and was no longer afraid of personal interaction, he spent a lot of time helping Vivian with things around the house. She has owned a home before but never maintained one. She had never mowed a lawn or planted flowers. Tom had promised to be handy if she needed anything and she learned to rely on him more than she expected. She went into labor just after dinner on fifth of August, she called Tom while struggling to get her go bag from the bedroom. Tom came over and let himself in with his daughter at his heels.

“Go home, you’ll be ok by yourself for a few hours, I have to take Vee to the hospital now.”

Daphne said, “You ain’t getting rid of me, Ms. Vee needs me to hold her hand,” and looked at Vivian for approval.

Vivian looked at Tom but spoke to Daphne, “Yeah, baby I need you to hold my hand.” Vivian was scared, more scared than she could remember, not for herself physically, but her ability to be a good mother. She held Daphne’s hand like so many girls have held hers over the years.

Randall finished rewriting key areas and deleting others until the story was finally cleared for publication. Another coincidence to note was, Vivian was giving birth to a baby girl while the book made it onto the number one bestseller list of all the preorders it received. The release date was still two months away.

She didn’t give birth until five-o-five the next morning. Tom and Daphne both spent the night with her, during which time, Vivian visualized herself as Daphne, watching her mother die, and thought she must be scared. Vivian put all of her own fears aside to convince Daphne that everything was ok. That’s when Vivian realized she didn’t have to be afraid of being a mother, she was already acting like one and doing a pretty good job.

The book hit print and couldn’t stay on the shelves. A bold picture of Vivian’s knife, ‘Sweetie,’ adorned the cover with the

caption above reading: ‘Based on a true story’ ‘#1 Best Seller’ ‘V is for Vivian’ by Sadie Thompson and Randall Wade.

Ms. Baxter had a glass showcase made for her copy and displayed it proudly on her mantle next to Vivian’s graduation photo from Loyola. Oddly and yet another coincidence, Vivian had encased her knife, with a lock of Sadie’s hair tied with a small red ribbon, in a glass case. It was elegant and sat on a curio cabinet shelf in her bedroom.

Times have changed before their eyes. From one generation to the next, new challenges arose. Society was evolving and at times devolving. Vivian’s run at the injustices of the world had profound and lasting effects. Some say, she made matters worse by participating in the same behavior that she judged, but those were the people who had never experienced the evils firsthand, and it was a small group. Most people knew and understood it was a necessary evil and only someone with great vision and determination would have the courage to attempt it.

Every morning for months, after her baby’s birth, Vivian stood outside the house and watched for Daphne’s school bus. Tom and Vivian spent more and more time together. She learned he was a teacher, in middle school, some say the most stressful job there is. He didn’t appear to be damaged, but she figured to keep an eye on him just in case. He once had dreams of being a storm chasing meteorologist but, not for himself, but for his fear that Daphne could become an orphan at his selfish expense, was too much to consider. Something else to add to the coincidence list. Vivian’s pain from loss, Sadie, Frank, her mom, Sasha, and Tanya, was a daily burden, and being with, and sharing in Tom and Daphne’s life, helped bring her to terms with her own life, but nothing like the precious connection she had with her baby.

One year from her baby’s birth, Vivian had a professional photo of her taken at a nearby mall. Later that afternoon, she looked into the mirror and noticed two fine crow’s feet at the outside edge of each eye. Right before her eyes, she saw herself

aging. While her baby's eyes were fresh in her memory, she looked at her own eyes in the mirror, and it wasn't a far stretch for her to see her grandmother's eyes looking back. At that point she knew it was ok to change.

Vivian thought about that image of her grandmother, it felt like a personal reflection of herself, that life was timeless. The baby becomes woman, who then begins anew. She began to see snapshots of her life, frozen, buried in her memory, which proved most comforting to her. She reviewed her life's timeline and realized she had the power to change the whole time.

Ms. Baxter wasn't Vivian's first foster parent but knew of Vivian's social services records and how her first foster parent sexually abused her. That was frightening to Blanche, because the same thing had happened to her when she was young. The difference being, Blanche was pretty torn up internally after her brutal rape, she later ended up having a hysterectomy. She was fifteen and would never have children. She chose to be a foster parent in her forties out of loneliness. Blanche's fondest memories were the times she taught Vivian to act like a lady. It gave her the chance to be close to her, even though she knew Vivian didn't have the same feelings as other kids. She knew of Vivian's psychosis from the beginning yet supported her always.

From twelve years old to sixteen, Vivian was in and out of foster care. For the first sixteen years of her life, nobody wanted her. She felt like trash that people through away. By the time she moved in with the Baxter's she was already working the streets. Ms. Baxter had seen the worst in Vivian's nightmares and was always there to wipe the tears and brush her hair. She held her as often as Vivian would allow, but Vivian missed all that, she was too busy being angry, feeling sorry for herself for being a victim. It consumed her to the point she couldn't see the love in front of her.

Vivian looked at her baby and thought about Ms. Baxter. Vivian called her mom, not foster mom, but it never really sank

in until now, that she had always been there. Vivian was living the life Blanche wished she could have led. Instead of succumbing to failure and defeat as she did, she could root for Vivian's success in battle. How she wished she had Vivian's courage.

Vivian's life had been a constant battle to be loved. All this time and all this carnage seemed wasted when she realized that she'd had her mother's love the whole time.

One week later, Kate received a card in the mail. There was no return address, and the blurry postmark could barely make out that it came from Georgia. Inside the card the words, 'C'est la vie' were written, and a photo of a baby girl. On the back of the photo was a name and date.

Kate saw the picture, read the name, and smiled; she knew who it came from. The wait was over, and a year of worry was over in an instant. So thankful the worst hadn't happened and looking at the gleam on the baby's face told her that Vivian was happy and was where she needed to be. She rushed to Ms. Baxter's right away. Excited to be sure, she got a speeding ticket on the way over.

Kate knocked on the door, Mr. Baxter let her in and asked, "I can see it in your face; you have news?"

Kate was surprised, that was the first time she recalled him speaking, all this time she thought he was deaf. "Yes, I do where's Blanche?"

"Sewing room, I'm sure."

Kate stepped lively through the house and found herself watching her soap operas in the dimly lit living room. "I got something in the mail today," Kate announced as she took a seat in a chair across from her. She slowly and deliberately opened the envelope and handed Blanche the card.

She looked at the card curiously and Kate heard her whisper, "C'est la vie," Vivian's favorite French saying. Blanche looked up at Kate, then looked back to the photo. Tears of joy



rolled down her cheek as she saw Vivian in those big brown eyes. A huge smile lit up her face when she read the name on the back, “Virginia Sadie Hansen,” and she knew everything was going to be ok.