

Chapter 1

IT WAS A blindingly sunny morning in May, and Joe Molinari was out for a walk in the park with Martha, his smart and funny dog, and Julie, his adorable nine-month-old baby girl.

Julie was in a sling, her belly against her great big daddy's chest, looking over his shoulder and waving her fingers toward the lake with every confidence that she was making real words and that her dad would be happy to take direction.

"Do you have a license to point those things?" Joe said to the child.

"Damn right," Joe replied in his best imitation of how Julie would speak if she could. "We all know who's in charge here, Daddy. I only need to

point and babble. Heh-heh. Race you to the bench. By the ducks.”

Joe ruffled Julie’s hair and got a better grip on Martha’s leash as he took in the scene again. He ran his eyes across the path to the bench, checking out the people with dogs and strollers, the shadows between the trees, and the traffic beyond the glare of the water; then he paused to double-check a middle-aged guy smoking a cigarette, staring deep into his phone.

These were the habits of a former federal agent and until recently the deputy director of Homeland Security. He was now a consultant specializing in risk management assessment for big corporations, government agencies, and other authorities.

Currently, Joe was six months into a job he’d been working eighteen hours a day, mainly from his office in the spare bedroom. It was a complex project, an obstacle course of practical and political complications. He felt fine about how it was coming along. And he also felt good about the lay of the land as he settled onto an empty bench with a fine ducky view of the lake.

Julie laughed and beat the air with her hands as he unstrapped her from the sling and sat her on his

lap. Martha came over and tried to wash Julie's face before Joe interceded and pulled the border collie to his side. Julie loved Martha and giggled a long peal of baby talk just as Joe's cell phone rang.

It wasn't Lindsay's ring. Pawing his shirt pocket, he saw that the caller was Brooks Findlay, the exec who'd commissioned his assignment with the Port of Los Angeles. Joe pictured the man: a former college football player, fit, thinning blond hair, dimples.

It was odd to get a call from Findlay first thing in the morning, but Joe answered the phone.

Findlay said, "Joe. It's Brooks Findlay. Is this a good time to talk?"

Findlay's voice was shaded by a dull metallic tone that put Joe on alert.

What the hell is wrong with Findlay?

Chapter 2

“I’M FREE TO talk,” Joe said to Findlay. “But I’m not at my computer.”

“Not a problem,” said Findlay. “Look, Joe. I’ve got to terminate our arrangement. It’s just not working out. You know how it is.”

“Actually, I don’t know,” Joe said. “What’s the problem? I don’t understand.”

A crowd of young boys entered Joe’s field of vision, shouting to one another, kicking a soccer ball along the asphalt path. At the same time, the baby was giving Joe a new set of directions. He kept his hand on her tummy and hoped she didn’t start screaming. Julie could *scream*.

“Brooks, can you hear me OK? I’ve put a lot of

time into this project. I deserve an explanation and a chance to correct—”

“Thanks, Joe, but it’s outta my hands. We’ll take it from here, OK? Your confidentiality contract is in effect, of course, and, uh, your check’s in the mail. Listen, I’ve got incoming. Gotta sign off. Take care.”

The line went dead.

Joe held the phone for a few long moments before he returned it to his pocket. *Wow*. No apologies. Not even a face-saving explanation. Just a needlessly brutal chop.

Joe reviewed his last conversations with Findlay, looking for clues to something he might have missed, some hint of a complaint—but nothing lit up the board. Actually, Findlay had seemed happy with his work. And Joe was sure his preliminary analysis of the container security protocols at the Port of Los Angeles was solid.

He really hadn’t seen this coming.

After pushing through the initial shock and confusion, Joe glimpsed his new reality. First there would be the loss of income, then the humiliation of having to explain this sinkhole to the next guy interviewing him for a job.

That thought was just about intolerable.

He wanted to call Lindsay, but on the other hand, why ruin her day, too?

“Hey, Julie,” Joe said to his now fussing daughter. “Can you believe it? Daddy got fired. Over the phone. *Bang.*”

Joe buckled the baby back into her sling, and she reached up and touched his cheek.

“I’m OK, Julie Anne. I’m thinking we should all go home now. I’m in the mood for a banana smoothie. Sound good to you?”

Julie looked like she was going to cry.

His little girl was mirroring his feelings.

Joe said, “OK, OK, sweetie. Don’t cry. We can come back and see the ducks later. We can come back every day into the foreseeable future. I can put peaches in that smoothie, all right? You like peaches.”

“I sure do, Daddy,” Joe said in his baby voice. He swept his gaze around the park and then stood up with Julie.

“You ready, Martha? That’s the girl.”

She woofed and jumped, so he gave her the full length of her leash till they were leaving the park, then pulled the lead in for the couple of blocks toward home.

By then, Joe wasn't thinking of fruit and ice and yogurt. He was thinking of Findlay, pressing that gutless piece of crap through the blender.

Chapter 3

I WAS BEHIND my desk that morning as light streamed through the Bryant Street windows and slashed across the squad room's linoleum floor.

My partner, Inspector Rich Conklin, was standing behind me to my right, and Chief of Police Warren Jacobi loomed impatiently over my left shoulder.

Jacobi had caught a couple of bullets in his leg and hip a few years ago and the injuries had aged him. He was fifty pounds overweight, his joints crackled and popped when he walked, and the pain had drained the fun from his salty sense of humor.

He grumbled, "Wait till you see this," and handed me a disc; then he sighed loudly as we waited for my "lazy-ass computer" to boot up.

I slid the disc into the drawer. The drive whirred, and then a video, time-dated 3:06 this morning, appeared on my screen. The camera had been positioned under flickering streetlights in a nearly deserted block in the notoriously sketchy Tenderloin. The footage was grainy, shot with a cheap surveillance cam of the type used more as a prop than as a tool for actually identifying people.

“That’s Ellis Street,” said Jacobi. “And that’s what I call crud,” he added, stabbing a sausage-like finger at three figures entering the frame. The men wore black billed caps and navy-blue Windbreakers with white letters reading SFPD across the back. They also held automatic handguns as they headed smartly toward an all-night check-cashing store with a yellow sign above the window reading Payday Loans. Checks Cashed.

I straightened in my seat, then turned to shoot a look at Jacobi.

What the hell is this?

“Balls on these bastards,” he said. “Boxer. It’s hard to make out. Can’t you focus that picture?”

“What you see is what you get,” I said.

For long, gritty seconds, we watched the cops advance along the dark commercial street lined

with low, blocky buildings. Then they converged on the lit-up storefront and went through the door in single file.

A moment later, the lights inside the store went out. The door burst open and one of the “cops” ran out with a satchel under one arm, followed by the other two men, who were carrying similar bags.

Now that they were heading toward the camera, I looked for facial features, something that could be run through facial-recognition software.

But the faces were all the same.

Then I got it. The bad guys were wearing latex masks that completely disguised their features. Seconds after leaving the store, the men in the SFPD Windbreakers had run out of camera range.

Jacobi said, “Christ. Someone please tell me that these men are anything but cops.”

Chapter 4

I FELT SICKENED at what I had just seen on the footage. Like Jacobi, I hoped we were looking at holdup guys with a bad sense of humor, not actual police officers pulling off an armed robbery.

I asked Jacobi, “Were there any fatalities?”

“One,” he said. “The owner wouldn’t give up the combination to the safe until he was shot to pieces. He managed a few words with the EMTs before he bled out on the floor. He said cops did it. The kid who worked for him was interviewed on scene. He said there had been about sixty grand in the floor safe.”

Conklin whistled.

Jacobi went on, “This is the second one like this. A few days ago, three men in SFPD caps and

Windbreakers robbed a Spanish market. A mercado. No one died, but it was another big score. It goes without saying, these guys have to be stopped or every man and woman in uniform is going to take shit for this whether we deserve it or not.”

Conklin and I nodded, and Jacobi kept going.

“Robbery squad is already working the case, but I told Brady I want the two of you to work with them now that we’ve got a homicide.

“Boxer. You know Philip Pikelny, who heads up Robbery? Call him. You and Conklin work with his guys. This is the most important case in the house.”

“We’ve got it, Chief.”

Muttering to himself, Jacobi stumped out of the bullpen.

About now, Robbery would be canvassing Ellis Street and Forensics would be taking apart a check-cashing shop called Payday Loans. Checks Cashed. All we could hope for was a snitch or that this professional crew had left evidence behind.

I called Phil Pikelny and repeated Jacobi’s instructions. The sergeant told me what he knew about the case so far.

“The scene is still off-limits,” Phil said. “CSU

has barred the doors until they're done, which could be later today."

Phil told me he would get us the footage of the first "Windbreaker heist," the armed robbery of a mercado.

"It's with the DA's Office, but I'll put in a request to get a copy to you ASAP."

I called Administration and asked for time sheets for every cop at every rank in the Southern Station, thinking maybe we could at least make a list of cops who were off duty when those heists went down.

And for me, question number one was: Were these robbers really cops? Or just crooks in cops' clothing? Either way, wearing police Windbreakers probably gave the robbers a few seconds' grace before the victims knew they were being hit.

My good-doin' partner made a breakfast burrito run and I put up a fresh pot of coffee in the break room. Then we settled into our facing desks, ready for a roll-up-your-sleeves desktop investigation.

Chapter 5

HOURS AFTER TALKING with Phil Pikelny, Conklin and I were still waiting for the DA's Office to send over the video of the Windbreaker cops' first known heist. I checked my watch. I could still make it. I told my partner I'd be back in a couple of hours.

"I have a date and I can't be late."

Richie opened his desk drawer, pulled out a slim, brightly wrapped package with a bow and a gift card, and handed it to me.

"This is for Claire. Try to bring me back some cake." He grinned winningly. He's a handsome guy who has somehow avoided becoming vain.

I took the gift, as well as the one I'd stashed inside my top drawer, then got my car out of the

lot across the street. Two twisted streets and ten minutes later, I parked my ancient Explorer at the curb in front of the Bay Club. I put my ID on the dash. Then I walked around the corner to Marlowe, a fabulous eatery housed in a brick building with wine and food quotes etched on the large-paned casement windows.

I peered through the glass and saw Yuki and Claire in the back at a table for four. They seemed intensely involved in conversation, and from the looks on their faces, they were taking opposite sides. I came through the door into the bright, industrial-style interior, and Yuki spotted me right away. It almost looked like she was hoping for rescue.

She called out over the loud conversation that was bouncing off the tile and steel surfaces: “Lindsay, over here.”

I headed toward my pals, and Claire stood up for my hug. She looked gorgeous, wearing black pants, a V-neck sweater, and a diamond pendant shaped like a butterfly around her neck. Claire is usually trying to lose a few pounds, but she always looks perfect to me.

I said, “Love you, Butterfly. Happy birthday, girlfriend.”

She laughed. “Love you, too, Linds.”

She hugged me back, and I swung into a chair across from her and next to Yuki. Small-boned Yuki was impeccably dressed in a blue suit, her sleek hair falling to her creamy silk collar. A string of pale angel skin coral beads at her throat. When I’d last seen Yuki a week ago, she’d looked a little happier than she did now.

“You OK?” I asked.

“I’m good,” she said.

We embraced, and I had just hung my jacket over the back of my chair when Cindy sailed up to the table, glowing like a rose at sunrise.

There was more hugging and kissing all around, Cindy adding a gift to the growing pile of sparkly paper and ribbons in the center of the table. We high-fived each other and I signaled to the waiter.

I was hungry for the specialty of the house: a hamburger made with Niman Ranch beef, topped with caramelized onions, bacon, cheese, and horseradish aioli, nestled between halves of a hot, buttered bun. With fries. And even more than that upcoming delight, I was very glad to be with my best friends.

It was Cindy who had named our little group the Women’s Murder Club. It was kind of a joke,

and at the same time entirely for real, because the four of us certainly surrounded the subject of murder: me in Homicide; Claire, San Francisco's medical examiner; Yuki, a rising star in the DA's Office; and Cindy Thomas, a top-tier crime reporter at the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Cindy was a new author, too. Her nonfiction book, *Fish's Girl: A True Story of Love and Serial Murder*, was grounded in a case Conklin and I had worked and two killers we had both known very well. Cindy had followed up the case and helped bring one of those killers down.

Her book was coming out at the end of the week. I was pretty sure that was why she was glowing.

After we'd ordered drinks, Claire piped up. "Yuki's quitting her job."

Cindy and I both said, "No way!" at the same time.

"I'm *thinking* about it," Yuki said, "just *thinking* about it. It's, like, an idea, you know? Geesh, you guys."

Cindy jumped in with what I was imagining.

"Oh. My. God. I know what's going on with you. You're *pregnant*."

Yuki was married to my boss, the tough but fair Lieutenant Jackson Brady—but they’d only been married for four *months*. I didn’t have a chance to get my mind around the idea of Yuki and Brady having a child, because Yuki was answering Cindy in her typical rapid-fire style.

“No, no, *no*, I’m not pregnant, but if you don’t mind, all of you, we have to order lunch *now*, because I absolutely have to be in a deposition in an hour.”

And that was when my phone rang.

I looked at the caller ID while everyone stared bullets at me. We had one rule for our no-holds-barred get-togethers.

No phone calls.

“Sorry,” I said. “I’ve got to take this.”

And I did.

Chapter 6

I LEFT THE girls and found a niche where I could take the call in private.

“What’s wrong?” I said to Lieutenant Brady.

“A dead body at Twenty-Fourth and Balmy Alley,” he said. “I need you and Conklin to do a preliminary workup. Lock down the scene and sit tight until replacements arrive. Jacobi wants you and Conklin on the check-cashing heist, nothing else.”

I rejoined my friends.

I said, “Sorry, guys. That was the boss. I’ve got to go.”

Yuki tossed her napkin a few inches into the air in exasperation.

Cindy said, “What can you tell me?”

You can take the reporter out of the *Chronicle*, but you can't take the reporter out of Cindy.

"Nothing," I said. "I can't tell you even one little thing."

"How many times do I have to prove I'm trustworthy?" said Cindy. "Plus, you owe me."

Actually, Cindy was right. On both counts. I trusted her. And a few months ago, she'd saved my life.

"I still can't tell you anything. Not a word."

I grabbed for my jacket and had just about secured it when Claire said, "I cannot believe this is happening *again*."

The expression on her face stopped me. She was pissed. Highly.

"*What's* happening again?" I asked her.

"This is almost exactly what happened last year on my birthday," said Claire. "And the year before *that*."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm *damned* sure. Although as I recall, last year we actually ate most of our lunch before you bolted from the table. Check your memory, Lindsay. When was the last time you saw me blow out the candles?"

"I'm sorry. I can't get out of this. I'll make it up

to you, Claire. To everyone. Including myself. That's an iron-clad promise."

I apologized some more, blew kisses, and fled the restaurant. I called Rich Conklin from the street, and while I walked to my car, I said, "I'm ten minutes away."

"Same here."

The engine started right up. I peeled out and pointed the Explorer toward a busy intersection in the Mission.

Chapter 7

BALMY ALLEY AND Twenty-Fourth looked like a freeway pileup.

I counted three hastily parked cruisers, and another one was coming in behind me. Both streets were cordoned off, causing traffic to back up in the one open lane on Twenty-Fourth. Pedestrians had gathered three deep at the barrier tape with cell phones in hand, evidently having nothing better to do than gawp at a bleeding corpse in the crosswalk.

I parked on the sidewalk, got my point-and-shoot Nikon out of the console, and found Conklin, who was talking to a young cop. He introduced me to Officer Martin Einhorn, a rookie who'd been writing up a parking ticket when the incident occurred.

Einhorn's black eyes flashed back and forth between Conklin and me as he walked us through the scene. He was sweating through his uniform and his speech was high-pitched and staccato. Very likely he'd never seen a body before, and now he'd been this close to an actual murder as it happened.

He said, "I was putting a ticket on that red Mazda over there. The victim was crossing the street. There were a lot of people crossing at the same time, both ways. Tourists mostly," he said, pointing his chin in the general direction of the sightseer magnet: vividly colored murals protesting human rights abuses over the last fifty years.

"I didn't see the attack," said the rookie. "I heard the screaming, and when everyone scattered, I saw . . . her." He took a moment to get himself together before continuing.

"I called it in and the EMTs got here like a minute later. They said the victim was dead and I told them to leave her body in place. That this is a crime scene."

"Exactly right," I said.

Einhorn nodded, then said a squad car had arrived after a few minutes and the officers had strung tape. "We got as many names as we could,

but people were trying to get out of here and we didn't have enough manpower to detain them. Those two witnesses hung in. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Gosselin, right over there. Mrs. Gosselin saw the attack."

While Conklin approached the couple standing outside a smoke shop, I took a wide-angle view of the crime scene and got a fix on where the victim lay in relation to cars, buildings, and people. Then I ducked under the tape and identified myself to the officers who were protecting the body and the scene.

One of the cops said, "Right this way, Sergeant. Mind the blood."

"Got it," I said.

I gloved up, then moved closer so that I could get a good look at the victim.

Chapter 8

IT WAS A terrible sight.

The dead woman was lying on her side. She was white, had shoulder-length brown hair, and looked to be in her late forties or early fifties.

She had cared about her appearance, and wore expensive clothing: an unbuttoned tan raincoat over blood-soaked beige knit separates. The source of the blood looked to be a long slice through her clothes from her lower abdomen up to her rib cage that had likely required strength, determination, and a long, sharp blade.

The victim had bled out fast. She might never have known what had happened to her.

I trained my camera on the conspicuous wound. Then I shot close-ups of the victim's hands—no

wedding band—and of her face, and of her stockinged feet, which lay like beached fish where she'd fallen out of her shoes.

An authentic and pricey large Louis Vuitton handbag lay beside her. I opened the bag and photographed the contents: a pair of good running shoes, a makeup kit, a Jimmy Choo sunglass case, a paperback novel, and a brown leather wallet, new and of good quality.

When I opened her wallet, I learned that the victim's name was Tina Strichler. Her driver's license listed her age as fifty-two, and her home address was about six blocks from the scene of her death. Strichler had a full deck of credit cards, and business cards identifying her as a psychiatrist. She also had receipts for recent purchases and two hundred twenty-two dollars in cash.

I typed Strichler's name into my phone, using an app that linked up to SFPD databases—and got nothing back. Which didn't surprise me. So far, I had nothing to explain why this woman of means had not been robbed. She'd been gutted in broad daylight on a busy street where cell phone cameras were pointing in every direction.

I circled the body and took photos of the crowd

on the sidewalks on the chance that whoever had killed this woman was watching the activity at the crime scene.

Conklin came toward me and summarized the witness statements, using his hands to point out the direction the victim had been coming from.

“The Gosselins were crossing Balmy Alley toward the victim,” he said. “Mrs. Gosselin didn’t notice the killer until he struck or punched out at the victim’s midsection. All she saw was a medium-size white guy in a black jacket or coat or shirt with the tails out. She *thinks* he had brown hair.”

Conklin looked exasperated, and I felt the same way. So many pairs of eyes, and one of the only two witnesses had seen practically nothing.

My partner went on.

“After the attack, the doer kept going and disappeared into the crowd. Mr. Gosselin saw none of this. He went to his wife when she started screaming. The rest was chaos. A stampede.”

An unmarked car pulled up and two guys from our squad got out: Fred Michaels and Alex Wang, both new hires by Brady.

Conklin and I greeted them and brought them up to date on the details of the crime as we knew

it. I told them I'd send them a typed version of my notes and the photos as soon as I got back to the Hall. And then, as sorry as I was to do it, I turned the case over to the new guys.

Conklin and I had our own horrible murder waiting for us at our desks. We got back into our separate cars and were headed back to the Hall when, as I turned onto Bryant Street, something came to me. It was a realization that just about reached out and hit me like a slap across the face.

Claire had been *right*.

There *had* been murders on each of her birthdays for the previous two years. And I was almost positive that those cases hadn't been solved.

Chapter 9

WHEN THE WRETCHED day finally ended and I came through the front door of our apartment, Martha wiggled her butt, barked, and sang me an excited welcome-home song. I hugged her, held her front paws, and danced a few steps with her. Then I called out to Joe.

He called back.

“I’m giving Julie a bath.”

OK, then.

I hung up my jacket, kicked off my shoes, and put my gun in the cabinet, locking it up. I walked with Martha to the open kitchen of our airy apartment on Lake Street, where I’d come to live with Joe as his bride. A year later, this was where I gave birth to Julie during a

blacked-out and very stormy night while Joe was out of town.

That was at the top of the list of the most memorable nights of my life.

I topped up Martha's dinner bowl and poured two chilled glasses of Chardonnay. With Martha trailing behind me, I went to the master bathroom.

I knocked, opened the door, and saw the two people I love the most. My smile stretched out to my ears.

"Awwww," I cooed. "Look how cute and clean she is."

I leaned down and kissed Joe, who was kneeling beside the tub. Julie grinned her adorable face half off, lifted her arms, and squealed. I put the wine-glasses on the vanity. Then I kissed Julie's hand, making funny noises in her palm. I handed Joe the pink towel that was appliquéd with OUR BABY GIRL.

I understand that first-time parents are a little goofy, but this towel had been a *gift*.

"I need a bath myself," I said as Joe lifted the damp baby into his arms.

"You go ahead," said my handsome and most wonderful husband. "You OK with Pizza Pronto? I'll call in an order."

“Brilliant,” I said. “Sausage, mushrooms, onions, OK?”

“You forgot the jalapeños.”

“Those, too.”

The pizza arrived, pronto.

Over our down-and-dirty dinner, I told Joe about the Windbreaker cops. When the pizza box was in the trash, the baby was asleep, and Joe was working in his home office, a.k.a. the spare bedroom, I brought my laptop to the living room and took over the big leather sofa.

I’d worked the Windbreaker cops case at both ends of my day, but I found I couldn’t stop thinking about Tina Strichler, the shrink who’d been gutted in the street.

Now that I had a full belly and some free time, I felt compelled to check out the homicides that had happened on Claire’s birthday the two previous years.

I was almost positive that these cases had somehow slipped through the cracks.

Chapter 10

MY HUSBAND STOOD behind me, his hands working on the clenched muscles in my neck.

“Oooh, I think I like working at home,” I said.

“Yes, well, I’m the legendary man with the slow hands.”

I laughed. “Yes, you are.”

“More wine?”

“No, thanks. I’m good.”

“OK, then,” he said, giving my shoulders a squeeze. “Martha and I are going for a run.”

“I’ll wait up.”

As soon as Joe and Martha had left the apartment, I checked on our sleeping little one, and then I went back to work.

I typed in my password and opened the SFPD

case log to kick off my search. The index to the files was little more than a list of the victims; each case was dated and marked either active, closed, or pending. The name of the lead inspector on each case was listed under the victim's name.

Since I was searching for murders on specific dates, it didn't take long to find the two women who'd been killed on Claire's birthday. I stared at the names, and I remembered the occasions.

Just the way it had happened today, I'd been called from the table to go to the crime scene because I was a ranking officer, on duty, and near the location when the body had been discovered.

I clicked open the older of the two unsolved cases.

Two years ago a woman named Catherine Hayes had been killed outside her father's coffee shop on Nob Hill. Hayes, who worked for her father during the day, went to night school for accounting and finance. On that twelfth day of May, she'd been having a smoke outside while talking to a friend on the phone when she'd been stabbed in the back. Then her throat had been slit.

There were no witnesses, and the friend who had been on the phone with Hayes had heard only

the victim's screams. Hayes hadn't been robbed. The killer took his knife and left nothing behind; no note, no DNA, no skin cells under the victim's nails. The leads were thin to nonexistent, and nothing panned out. Catherine Hayes left devastated friends and family, and her open file was still chilling.

So was the file of Yolanda Pirro, a poet who'd been seen competing in last year's 12k Bay to Breakers Race, a huge attraction that had been run annually for over a hundred years. Many of the runners wore costumes; some even ran nude, or dressed like fish and ran backward, as if they were swimming upstream. Go figure.

Pirro's body was found the day after the race in a thicket of shrubs at the end of the course. She'd been wearing runners' gear, nothing that would make her stand out.

Pirro had multiple stab wounds, any one of which could have been fatal. Her devastated husband and close circle of friends said she had no enemies. She was a poet who worked as a volunteer at a community garden and liked to run.

She hadn't known Catherine Hayes, and the two women had no common friends, family, or

acquaintances. The Northern District had caught the case and had *no* suspects and no witnesses—and at the same time, tens of thousands of suspects who'd participated in the race or watched from the sidelines. And so, without a clue, Yolanda Pirro's case went cold.

The Pirro case reminded me a lot of Strichler.

Lots of people in a crowd, but no witnesses.

Including Tina Strichler, all three victims who were killed on Claire's birthday were attractive white females between the ages of thirty-four and fifty-two, living within three densely populated miles of one another.

Did anything connect them?

Well, yes. *They'd all been knifed.*

I was staring over my laptop, searching my mind for anything else that would link these three women's deaths, when someone kissed my temple.

I put my arms up the way Julie does, and Joe gave me a big crinkly smile and another kiss. He came around the sofa and sat down next to me.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Prowling around in some old case files."

"Oh, yeah? Why?"

I told him all about it.