



**DOROTHY
UHNAK**

**FALSE
WITNESS**

False Witness

A Novel

Dorothy Uhnak



This book is dedicated with deep affection and gratitude ...

to Tom O'Rourke, for a lifetime of friendship

to Jack O'Brian and Barry Farber for consistent kindness and generosity from the very beginning
through the long years

Special thanks to my daughter, Tracy, not only for the hours of typing and deciphering, but more
importantly for offering encouragement and strength when I faltered
and to Dr. Marvin J. "Chick" Schissel, as fine a raconteur as he is a dentist

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Prologue

CRIME SCENE

AS SHE LAY NEAR death, Sanderalee Dawson was spared the pain of her terrible injuries by shock.

She swallowed the salty thin blood that filled her mouth. It was an instinctive attempt to keep the life force inside her, as was her attempt to breathe in small, short, careful gasps rather than in huge lung-filling expansions, which she might then be unable to exhale. There was a slow dawning of consciousness working, devoid of panic: if her attempts to breathe made a lot of noise, he might hear her, might still be nearby, would realize she was not yet dead, might return to hurt her again.

Having made the decision to survive, she experienced one quick electric shock of pain so total, so devastating that the cry caught in her throat, seemed about to strangle her. She was suffocating and it was not gentle or easy. It was terrifying and she fought against it.

She opened her eyes and gazed without understanding at the pendulum motion of the telephone receiver as it skimmed the floor, dangling from the end of the uncurled white rubberized cord.

There was a hand holding the receiver, the fingers locked in a rigid grasp. It was a severed hand and a thick trail of blood followed the back and forth swaying motion, in a bright red pattern on the white ceramic tile kitchen floor. It was hers.

Part One

THE VICTIM

CHAPTER 1

SHE HAD BEEN LEFT for dead. Had Sanderalee Dawson been, in fact, dead, a great many lives and reputations and careers and ambitions and relationships would now be quite different. Including mine. Especially mine.

When my phone rings in the middle of the night, I have a facility for becoming not only awake but instantly, totally, sharply alert. For some stupid, dark-based reason, I try to convince not only the caller but myself that I wasn't asleep, I was just lying there in the darkness waiting for an emergency call.

As Bobby Jones attempted to control his obvious excitement, his voice expanded with the Nebraska flatness that four years in New York City had not totally obliterated. Where anyone else's quickens, he slows down.

"Lynne, I've sent a patrol car to pick you up. It should be at your apartment within the next five minutes or so. I'm calling from Roosevelt Hospital. They might have to move her for special surgery and it looks very bad. She's lost a lot of blood. I'm heading for her apartment and I'll meet you there. Your driver knows where it is—that old Holcroft Hall building near Carnegie Hall."

I don't see the graveyard-shift doorman, Giorgio, very often. It is unusual for me to dash out of my building and into a New York City Police Department squad car at four in the morning. But Giorgio handled it with great aplomb: he arrived at the curb before I did and held the car door open, sweeping aside with a semi-bow as though it were your standard black limo. There wasn't any traffic at all. We made the trip from lower Fifth, where I live, to 58th and Seventh Avenue in record time.

Bobby Jones appeared from the shadows and escorted me into the entrance area of the building, holding open the heavy iron-scrolled glass door, which led into a small cubicle that provided the doorman a good view out. The uniformed doorman was seated behind his battered wooden desk, his job taken over by a large, thuggish-looking detective who squinted with professional suspicion.

"This is Bureau Chief Lynne Jacobi, D.A.'s office," Bobby informed the detective. The introductions seemed to stop on that one-sided note.

"And your name and command, officer?"

He sucked on a tooth while making up his mind. I've met his kind before. Many times.

"Detective Arthur Godley, Homicide. Godley. Not Godfrey."

"Uh-huh. And this gentleman?"

The doorman was instantly on his feet. "I'm Timothy Doyle, ma'am," he told me in a soft, age-appropriate melodious brogue.

"Tim here was on duty the whole night, Miss Jacobi. He's given me a statement, which is being typed up right now for him to sign."

“Mr. Doyle, I’d like to talk to you after I come back from upstairs. I could use a cup of strong wake-up tea and I have a feeling you could brew just the thing.”

Timothy Doyle’s face lit up and he nodded enthusiastically. He was an Irishman from another era: one of the proud-humble, tough-gentle, devoted-independent, reliable-to-the-death immigrant who considered being “in service” an honorable and respectable profession.

Bobby Jones handled the old-fashioned elevator as though he’d been doing it all his life. He brought the rumbling old car flat even with the eighth-floor hallway and held it steady with one hand on the control as he pulled at the folding gate.

I walked directly into Detective Arthur Godley’s twin brother, or his clone.

“Sorry, lady,” he growled. “Unless you live on this floor you can’t come up here. This is a sealed off crime-research area.”

Neither Bobby nor I had to go through the identifications again. Chief of Detectives Jim Barrow swept from the open door of Sanderalee Dawson’s apartment. I was enclosed momentarily in his embrace: a hard, smothering hug followed by a quick cheek kiss of friendship and I thought fleetingly, of what the reaction of my young female staff members would have been. Oh God, that kind of chauvinistic crap. And you *allow* it! They have yet to discern what you allow and go with and what you put a sharp stop to. Barrow and I are equals. We work together on occasion and we have worked together very successfully through the years as each of us has risen through the ranks of our respective organizations. His division of the New York City Police Department prepares cases for consideration for my division of the New York County District Attorney’s Office. My people, in effect, evaluate and pass judgment on the work done by his people. We are the ones who have to go before the jury and present, in an orderly and convincing fashion, what they have come up with. There have been times when we’ve disagreed. There have been bitter and unpleasant moments. There have been times when Jim Barrow and I would gladly have paced off against each other, turned and fired. Except, of course, as an advocate of strict gun control, I do not carry.

I accept the friendly embrace from my professional equals. At times, a good hug can be very reassuring. I am nearly forty years old and I have been doing battle for many, many years without too many compromises along the way. My young female associates haven’t been in the war long enough to learn that there are necessary times of truce.

The small square entrance foyer to Sanderalee’s apartment was dark and cavelike with shiny dark brown ceramic tile flooring, darker brown walls, small dull wall lights. By comparison, the huge living room was a blaze of light caused not merely by the lamps and raw bulbs set up by the investigators but by the decor: soft pale monochromatic beige sweep of couch leading to a subtle blending series of velvet chairs in just slightly darker shades, all set on wall-to-wall very thick, pale mushroomy carpet in the identical hue of the walls and ceiling. Beautiful wooden accent pieces: a desk, a small antique armoire lit from within to display a precise arrangement of exquisite collector

items—porcelains, paperweights, small silvery treasures.

The room was out of a magazine. Every item decorator perfect. Everything calculated to set off the main occupant. Sanderalee Dawson would serve as the centerpiece. The recessed spotlights would glance off and enhance her warm beige honey-gold complexion. Even in the confusion caused by the police technicians and photographers, one could see that the professional set designer had selected with great calculation every painting on the walls, every art book and flower arrangement. There was nothing impulsive or spontaneous. The only color selected for the room came from a wonderful collection of pillows; all sizes, all shapes, all designs.

The discordant, unanticipated color, dominating all the overturned furniture and tossed-about lamps, was the darkening brownish-red thickly shimmering blood. Sanderalee's life force was sprayed and splattered and pooled all over the room in a way that would have reduced her decorator to suicide. There could be no cleaning up. There would have to be a complete cleaning out.

Jim Barrow's heavy arm wrapped around me as he guided a path carefully around the forensic people who gathered, collected, photographed, measured, traced, paced, calculated, guessed, estimated, noted and gossiped. It was all routine to them, although rarely are they called upon to perform their rites in such a lush setting. From time to time, one or another hummed or whistled or stopped work to glance admiringly at the floor-to-ceiling collection of photographs of Sanderalee Dawson along one wall. The blank and beautiful face of the professional high-fashion model watched them without expression: a haughty dark beauty, mysterious, remote, slightly threatening in the distance created by the turn of her chin. And then, the surge of life and spirit caught by an excellent photographer who had created a playful mood: a let's have some fun with this damn thing babe, show us what ya got Sanderalee, yeah Sanderalee yeah yeah yeah. A series of quick click-click-click living shots. And then, a new Sanderalee Dawson: important lady. First black woman hostess of her own important 11:15 to midnight, five nights a week, live talk show. Important lady: beauty now merging with a keen intelligence, an in-charge, don't try to kid me, sucker, expression. The photographer had captured the essence of this phase of Sanderalee's personality. I'd been on her show a few times; I watched her on and off. Some of these photographs revealed some deep essence of the woman beyond what a snap-click-gotcha could find. I noted his name: Alan Greco.

They had entered the apartment, Sanderalee Dawson and unidentified male, stopping while she hung her angora hat and scarf and navy blue jogging jacket on the old-fashioned railroad-car hat rack in the hallway: brass antique, barely turn of the century. They had moved into the perfection of the living room. She had taken some things from the small refrigerator behind the bar and set them on a large tray: a bottle of white wine; a bottle of Perrier water; a bowl of limes, uncut; some cheeses ready to eat on a small china plate. There were two tall crystal glasses set on the bar, the ice cubes melting, the mineral water not poured, the elegant green bottle opened by a sterling silver opener and a sterling silver bottle cap for recapping.

“She seems to have been preparing for a social evening, at least for a friendly snack. They never got to it. It’s a little hard to trace the sequence,” Jim Barrow admitted. He turned and pointed to a small heap of silky undergarments. “Those, the bra and bikini underpants, were found right there. But the victim was found in the kitchen dressed in her lightweight ski sweater and jogging pants. Peculiar.”

It was peculiar. Jim pointed to a small object on the rug beside the bar. We both knelt, careful not to touch anything. It was a beautiful silver unicorn with about two inches left of what probably had been a four-inch silver horn. There was blood on the remnant of the horn and on the beautiful body of the fallen good luck symbol.

“My guess is that he attacked her suddenly, without warning, since she was getting ready for a quiet drink of soda water.” Jim Barrow shook his head. “That’s the trouble nowadays, Lynne, everyone drinking damn bubble water instead of something sensible like Scotch. I’d say the unicorn was on the counter and she grabbed it. My guess is that she connected. Unless we find that broken-off piece of silver horn, the ‘male-unknown’ might have it imbedded in him somewhere. The blood on the unicorn could be his or hers.”

We stood up. Barrow’s voice was soft and intense. It ignored the presence of all the technicians and the police personnel in the room, and created a lonely intimacy. I faced into the room with him as he had described, from the condition of the victim, the assault: beating, tearing, ripping; rape, sodomy, the near-murder which yet may have been accomplished.

It lingered; something of the dark passions remained and intensified the thought of Sanderalee alone with some madman. She, the center of this carefully created place of beauty and serenity, the reason for this place, this setting, had been the sole and isolated and vulnerable target of a terrible and unanticipated force.

Barrow led me to Sanderalee’s bedroom. It was a quiet oasis, which she had obviously created for herself and to hell with the decorator. There was a feeling of controlled chaos: yes, it’s cluttered, but damn it, it’s my clutter and I know where everything is. There was a stack of papers and notebooks and magazines on the glass-topped desk; there was a small dish of penny-candy on the table next to the bed; a fancy French telephone; a doodle pad; stuffed teddy bears and pink elephants and rag-dolls on the bed. A shelf of Madame Alexander dolls, black and white, elegant, expensive, untouched, the lovely little eyes seeing everything with disdain and disinterest.

“You got dolls in your bedroom, Lynne?” Barrow asked.

“I had my last doll when I was about eight or nine. And then I realized the trap that was being set for me.”

“And so you turned to law books and university applications. What’s your bedroom look like now, Lynne?”

“Steel furniture. Japanese mat on the floor. You know.”

“Oh, Lynne, Lynne, were I a few years younger. And not married and the father of ten first children and grandfather of six. You and I could have had a fine time of it. Here, take a look at the bathroom. Must have imported the whole damn thing from Hollywood.”

There was, indeed, the look of Hollywood. A large redwood tub with all kinds of interesting devices: brushes, hoses, controls, little seating platforms or whatever. The room itself was huge—swinger’s family room. There was a conventional stall shower; the toilet was carefully concealed in its own little compartment. Mirrored walls on two sides of the room. Actually they were sliding doors which hid closets containing more clothes than your local friendly department store.

And a lovely round sink, a flowered bowl set on a marble pedestal. The flowers in the bowl were covered with a bright, watery red. Sanderalee’s date had washed some of the blood off his hands in this room.

“My guess is he left her unconscious in the kitchen. She never made it in here. He seems to have gone exploring for God knows what reason.” Jim pointed to blood smears on the mirrored doors and on the doorframe. They were smudges, as though made by the brushing of a bloody sleeve. “Then, I washed his hands in here. Doesn’t seem to have touched anything. See that bloody washcloth? He used it to turn on the water faucet. Very careful about his fingerprints. I don’t think we’ll find any from the ‘alleged perpetrator.’ ”

“All the blood, Jim? My God, what the hell did he do to her?”

Barrow looked at me in surprise and, apologetically, he said, “I thought you knew about all the injuries, Lynne. I assumed your man, Jones, told you.” His firm arm around my shoulders led me into the hallway, through the living room, past the small expensive little custom bar into an antiseptic kitchen: a glaringly white room. Floors, walls, ceiling, cabinets white. Butcher-block countertop, stainless steel sinks; restaurant large freezer and refrigerator and stove. Brightly lit. More shocking because of the stark contrast: red on white. More blood than I had ever seen in one place before. And I have been on the scene of some very gory homicides.

There was a heavy meat cleaver on the floor, professional type. Bloody.

White telephone receiver swinging slightly along the floor, covered with blood.

“It’s still hard to trace the action, but I’d say the sexual assault took place in the living room. Now, her getting those clothes on—that’s a puzzle, but she was dressed when she came into the kitchen. At least, that’s an assumption; makes more sense than that he came in and put the clothes on her afterward. Well, at any rate, she made it into the kitchen and apparently there was a further struggle. Can’t say who grabbed the cleaver first; maybe she did, but he sure had it last.

“He hacked off her left hand.” Jim Barrow’s right hand chopped through the air smartly toward his left wrist. “Whack-o. Severed clean at the wrist. Her hand was clutching the service telephone receiver when the uniformed men arrived.”

Jim Barrow was a large bear-type man, the kind who probably never in his life had to go

involved in personal violence. Just his size, his presence, would discourage any challenger. He was a gentle man: strong, warm, reassuring. I leaned into him for a minute, grateful that I could do this. was one of those woman-perks and I was grateful for it.

His arm turned me from the spectacular red and white horror.

“Gee, I thought you knew, kid. I would have prepared you a little. Her *other* injuries are pretty bad. This guy came on like Attila the Hun, at least. From what I got so far, he slugged her hard enough to break the jawbones both sides of her face, her cheekbones, several of her teeth.” His strong pushing led us back into the living room where we both stared at the mess and Jim released me and pointed into the kitchen. “I’d say that somehow, probably in a state of shock, she managed to get back into the living room. Hence, this particular pool of blood. Then, I guess she wandered back inside the kitchen where Mr. Doyle, the doorman, and the two uniformed men found her. She would have strangled that young cop hadn’t reacted fast.”

“Strangled? She would have strangled?”

“Oh,” Jim Barrow said softly. “I didn’t tell you about her other ... injury.”

“My God, besides rape and sodomy and dismemberment and broken face bones and teeth, Jim. Besides all that, what the hell else could he have done to her?”

“Well, this she might have done to herself. No, not really, I mean during the course of the struggle. She put up a hell of a fight.” Jim rolled his lower lip between his teeth, then pantomimed a blow to his chin. “Bit her lower lip off,” he said.

CHAPTER 2

TIMOTHY DOYLE WAS A lovely man with a Mickey Rooney face and thick white theatrically long hair. He watched me carefully as I examined the titles of the paperbacks that filled three shelves on the wall of the little cubby just off the entrance vestibule. His shrewd bright blue eyes sparkled at my surprise.

He had impressed me properly and we sat across the tiny table from each other, hands wrapped around mugs of tea.

“I hope it’s not too sweet, my dear. I lace it with honey and lemon that I prepare special for the energy it gives. Not with your standard Irishman booze. I’m your oddball, sober, non-drinking non-stereotype, though that dummy Arthur Watsizname out there keeps asking wasn’t I maybe off dozing or boozin’ and missed seein’ this ... attacker leave the building.”

“I’ve just glanced at your statement. Now you tell me. Don’t worry about exact times or anything. Not right now. Right now, I just want to hear you tell me.”

He nodded and took one noisy sip of tea, held it in his mouth for a moment, then swallowed.

“Ms. Dawson came home from the studio at her usual time, maybe one-twenty, one-thirty or so. The studio limo brought her.”

He hesitated.

“Okay, she was brought home by the studio limo. You took her up to the eighth floor. Alone at this time?”

“Yes, ma’am. Alone. About fifteen minutes later,” he waved a hand, “as you said, you can check the times with my statement—well, she buzzed the elevator and I went up and brought her down.”

“Do you always escort passengers? No one rides up or down alone?”

“That’s exactly right. It’s an old-fashioned building; nothing automatic or modern. We just do things as we’ve done things all along. Now, then: she was dressed in her jogging clothes. Navy blue outfit with the green and white stripes; light blue fluffy knit hat and scarf—angora, is it? the kind of fluffy that gets all over you.”

Noted.

“How did she seem to you? Her mood.”

“Tense. Tight. Wound up.”

“Say anything to you?”

“Not a word; nothing. Nor I to her. So off she goes. I held the door open and she started off to the right, toward the Circle.”

“How far did you watch her go?”

He shook his head. “That was it. Just the direction: toward the Circle. Okay. It’s about two-thirds now and she’s back. And she’s got a runner with her.”

I took a deep breath. Timothy Doyle described him to me.

“I’m five-nine, so I measure everyone up or down from me, as I’m a middle-sized man, you might say. He was close to six feet, give or take an inch.” He held up his hand, interrupting himself. “Most important fact: he was a *white man*.”

“All right. What did he look like? Light hair, dark hair, color of his eyes? Just in your own words, Mr. Doyle.”

“I never examined his face, Ms. Jacobi. I never even took more than a quick glance. I noticed his white hands. I could say only that he was white and that is exactly all I can say about what he looked like.” Sadly, he added, “I could not identify him at all, Ms. Jacobi, as I did not look at his face.”

Terrific. A wonderful dream witness; but he had not looked at the perpetrator’s face. Mr. Doyle had been, as always, discreet.

“Did they talk about anything in particular in the elevator, Mr. Doyle?”

He closed his eyes for a moment; his wide forehead crumpled with thought. He shook his head.

“They never said a word, Ms. Jacobi. Not a single word. Neither him nor her; nor did I. Beyond maybe a nodding acknowledgment, you know, when I let them in, ‘Ms. Dawson, ma’am.’ It wouldn’t have been the thing, do you understand, for me to have given the man the once-over.”

“All right, then. You took them up to the eighth floor. Neither of them spoke to you or to each other. They got off and headed for her apartment and you went back down to your desk. And then?”

And then about an hour or so later, the light on his switchboard flashed and flashed, on and off sporadically. He plugged in to answer Sanderalee’s summons and heard the terrible sounds. Sounds that he’d never heard before, but so terrible that he had not a moment’s doubt of disaster.

“It’s a strange and funny thing, but I had a kind of *déjà vu* experience,” he told me with simple simplicity. “I felt a premonition. I heard the sounds coming from that poor girl’s telephone and without even thinking about it, I went right to the front door and as if it was all arranged, there was a patrol car parked not twenty feet away. It’s not a usual thing; I doubt it’s ever been just at that spot. Anyway, I just called out to them to come quickly. I guess something in my voice told them this was serious. They came. Two young patrolmen. Oh, so very young; the older of the two not more than twenty-five or -six, but the youngster maybe twenty-two or -three, poor lad. Not prepared for what we walked into. As if you could prepare for such a sight. But anyway ...”

I held up my hand and he waited politely. “You went with them, into the elevator, right? You, in effect, left the door unguarded, right?”

He drew himself up stiffly, vaguely insulted. “Yes, in effect.”

“Mr. Doyle, you and the patrolmen went up to the eighth floor and got off the elevator. From that point on, tell me everything you saw. Everything you heard. Slowly.”

He crossed himself swiftly; I wondered when was the last time he’d done that. It seemed an act of superstition rather than of faith.

“Ah, Jesus God, it was that terrible.” His brogue went thick and soft; almost a different voice—different man. His bright blue eyes clouded over; his tongue licked dry lips and his large, strong hand squeezed the tea mug tightly, then trembled as he set it on the small table. He looked directly at me but he was seeing the eighth floor: the apartment that reeked of Sanderalee’s agony.

“At first, we couldn’t find her, you know. We heard the noise, the soft groaning, like a wounded animal; softer even, like a hurt little bird. And of course, I realized and I told the policemen: the kitchen. That’s where the intercom phone is and she’d been calling down and that’s where she’d been. We walked right through that room, the living room, right through, right past all that upset, the chair knocked over, the things pushed aside. The blood.”

He stopped speaking.

“There was a great deal of blood, Mr. Doyle. Yes. I saw that myself. It must have been very shocking for you to walk in on that. And Sanderalee, Mr. Doyle. Tell me. *Tell me.*”

His eyes glazed. “There she was, you see, that poor child, all broken, all ... broken, all torn and bleeding, everything covered with blood and her hand, her poor hand was clutching the telephone like a vise.” He blinked and said to me, “It was hard to realize then, what we were seeing, how terrible it was. How hurt she’d been. Only her eyes seemed alive: her eyes, so wide-open, dear God, what her eyes had seen. And the poor younger cop, the twenty-two or twenty-three-year-old, Christ, he went whiter than the walls and the older policeman, he took over and he said, ‘Petey, get on the phone in the other room and get an ambulance’ and then ... I guess he realized what neither of us, the younger one or I, had realized. He said to me ... funny, this policeman’s voice was so strong and so calm. He took charge, very snappy like—like a soldier—he said to me, ‘Pop, you find a plastic bag in one of the cupboards here and you fill it with ice from the freezer. Just do it,’ he said, although I didn’t realize why. Like ‘boil water, the baby’s coming.’ ” Timothy Doyle laughed. It was a nervous, inappropriate laugh and we both knew it but he couldn’t help it. He laughed a little more; then he coughed and put his head down. When he raised his face, there were long running tears trickling down his cheeks. He reached out and pressed his arm. He was trembling.

“Mr. Doyle. You did that, what the policeman told you to do? The ice, the plastic bag?”

“Oh yes. I did that. And then the younger cop came back in and said the ambulance was on its way and then there was a terrible gagging sound. Yes. That’s what it was: a dying sound. Ms. Dawson was strangling right there on the floor and the three of us looking down at her. And the younger of the policemen, white-faced and shaken, he knelt down and just, it seemed to me anyway, he covered his face with his hands, he was face down to her. I couldn’t tell, of course, but I knew anyway, he was helping her to breathe and ... he looked up all of a sudden and—” Mr. Doyle stopped speaking.

He put his face in his hands and his shoulders heaved convulsively. I dug into my pocketbook and came up with a wad of tissues, which I separated: half for him, half for me. I felt a wave of sympathetic sobbing deep inside my chest, which is where it would have to stay for now. That’s all

needed: to sit and get hysterical with my witness.

“Okay, Mr. Doyle. Take a deep slug of that tea of yours. Okay. *Tell me, Mr. Doyle.*”

He regained control. It was even worse than when he'd been emotional. He spoke in a dead steady voice; by rote, he described the indescribable.

“When the young policeman tried to help her to breathe, he realized there was something blocking her windpipe, or whatever. He ... put his mouth over hers and sucked hard and then he raised his face and spit something into his hand. At just about that moment, the medics arrived. They burst into the apartment. They took one look and thought the young policeman was wounded. His face was covered with blood. His mouth ... and then he looked at what was in his hand. It ... it was what had blocked the girl's breathing. He screamed. The young policeman. He leaped up as though an electric prod had touched him.” Mr. Doyle studied his clasping and twining fingers for a moment and then said softly, “It was her lip, you see, the flesh that she had bitten off. It had come loose and slipped into her throat and he sucked it out and cleared her breathing passage. And saved her life, if the poor girl would live after all that's happened. And the policeman, he suddenly keeled over with his hands clutching his stomach, frantic as to where he could ... he was convulsed, you see, and my God, he didn't want to act to ... I grabbed his arm and turned him to the kitchen sink. Now maybe I destroyed some evidence, I hope to God not, but I turned on the cold water and sloshed the boy's face and washed away the vomit from the sink. And from his face. And the blood from his mouth.”

“And then what, Mr. Doyle?”

“And then, they took over is all. The medics. She was breathing with short gasping sounds and they bundled her up and took her out on a stretcher. And then. Yes. Then the older one, the older patrolman, he helped the medic pry the telephone receiver from—from her—her hand and ...”

“And put it into the plastic bag you'd filled with ice?”

He nodded.

“From the moment you saw her until they took her away on the stretcher, did she say a word? Anything that sounded like a word?”

“Not a word, ma'am. Just a small baby sound, a sighing when she breathed. Not a word.”

Okay. We'd gotten the shock stuff over with; he'd survived it. It was out in the open. Now Backtrack.

“Mr. Doyle. When you took Sanderalee Dawson and this man up in the elevator, and they didn't speak at all, and you didn't look directly at either of them, where did you look?”

He closed his eyes tightly, then snapped them open. “At his feet. At his running shoes. He was wearing a navy blue runner's suit. I said that in my report. But I'd forgotten about the shoes.”

“What about the shoes?”

“They were ... different. Not your usual Adidas or Nikes. They were different. I've never seen shoes exactly like that before.”

“Mr. Doyle, are you familiar with running shoes?”

“I am. In this building alone, I can’t tell you how many of them run. It’s the thing now, you know, and they get all decked out just so. Dear God, I wish I could tell you more, but just that one thing: his shoes were ... different. Special.”

“Okay. We’ll get some catalogues to you. Maybe they were imported or something. It might be very important, Mr. Doyle.” I stood up.

“Mr. Doyle, did you see this man come back downstairs? Did you see him again, after bringing him up to the eighth floor?”

“No, miss. He never came through the lobby.”

There was a back door—a service exit that opened outward; it had a safety lock so that it could not be opened from the outside. It backed onto an alley. Bloodstains had been found at the door, which had been shoved open and left ajar.

“Mr. Doyle, thank you for the tea, and for all your time. I will probably come back and talk with you again.” We walked into the small entrance hall and I looked up at the high ceiling for the first time. There was a lovely, shining crystal chandelier hanging from a gleaming brass chain. Dimly, I could make out angels on the ceiling, frolicking in a large circle.

“I’d like to really take a good look at Holcroft Hall. I’ve passed it many times through the years but never really looked at it.”

“I can give you its long and interesting past, Ms. Jacobi,” Timothy Doyle told me. “This place here, it’s the real genuine article, Ms. Jacobi. You come back another day and I’ll tell you,” he said with love and pride in his voice.

Bobby had his car ready at the curb and we headed toward Roosevelt Hospital. The morning light was grayish blue, dampish, raw with a March wind that had played around with Bobby’s yellow hair. The farmboy’s cowlick stood up dead center, defying the big-city hairstylist’s efforts. His handsome face was drawn and thoughtful. The scattering of freckles over the bridge of his nose was ridiculous: a man of thirty-two with freckles. Huck Finn. Bobby Jones. He sucked on the corner of his mouth, which activated two deep cheek dimples. We stopped for a red light, and he turned to me, his honest, open midwestern face astonished at the evil one human being had visited on another.

“My God, Lynne. My Lord, what he did to her.”

“They don’t do things like that in Lincoln, Nebraska, do they, Bobby Jones?”

“Except in wartime, I don’t think they do things like that anywhere in the world, Lynne.”

I smiled sweetly and then asked him, “Bobby, dear, have you ever heard of a mass murderer named Charlie Starkweather? I do believe he was a near neighbor of your’n.”

CHAPTER 3

WITHIN THREE MINUTES OF our arrival at the Roosevelt Hospital Emergency Unit we learned that Sanderalee Dawson had been transferred by ambulance to New York Hospital for special surgery. Within the next three minutes, it became crystal clear to me that a prosecutor's nightmare was unfolding in the large public waiting room.

In the center of the room, Deputy Police Commissioner in Charge of Public Relations Fred Mandell stood beaming and nodding and grinning and becoming serious and dramatic by turns, in response to his former colleagues from two of the major national television networks.

"Want to try that again, Freddie?"

"Turn the kid in to the camera, Fred. Damn. I'm not picking up on the blood enough."

Deputy Police Commissioner Fred Mandell was not a police officer. He had never been a police officer and he could never begin to qualify as a police officer. Yet he took his high appointed role as Public Relations Commissioner very much to heart. Rumor was he carried a pearl-handled .32 and even knew how to use it. He was handsome, personable and went out of his way to accommodate the cameramen assigned both from the networks and from the newspapers. He was posing and positioning one of my primary witnesses, the young patrolman who had apparently saved Sanderalee Dawson from strangling on her own lip.

I had spotted a small empty office on our way in and I told Bobby Jones, "Get that jerk over here right away. And get that young police officer off to a corner and don't let him open his mouth—not to show his bloody fangs or to make one more remark."

Deputy Police Commissioner Fred Mandell approached me with a pleasant expression, his arms opening wide for one of those European side-to-side embraces with kisses flung into the air. I slipped away from him and slammed the door closed. The puzzled, slightly worried expression wiped the stupid grin from his face.

"Been holding a little free-for-all press conference out there, have you, Fred?"

"Lynne, Lynne. They are our best friends in the long run. We've got to keep them on our side."

"How much did you let that poor dopey-looking kid with the blood on his mouth say?"

"Hey, Lynne, wasn't that kid something?" Fred shuddered. "Yuk, imagine sucking out a thing like that. And he's able to laugh and clown around about it now, just like it's an everyday thing. He couldn't have more than a year on the job, and he handled himself beautifully."

Wonderful.

"You keeping notes for your book, Fred: my three most wonderful cases as a police commissioner? You signed up with anyone yet? This will be one hell of a case. It's got all the elements: beautiful victim, a racial angle, sex-sex-blood-and-gore. Just one thing, Fred. You put a lip

on. Right now. A very tight, not-another-single-word lid. Not one single leak. Nothing, without my approval. Got that, Fred?”

“You’re a very uptight lady, Lynne, you know that?”

“Fred. Commissioner Mandell. Your fun is over for the night. Don’t make me get an injunction. Smile a lot and wink at your pals out there, but open your mouth once more, say one more word about my case without my permission, and I’ll take away your pearl-handled revolver.”

His handsome face tightened and then relaxed. He reverted to the anxious-to-please form of a television executive he had been before the Mayor, for God knows what reason, made him a police commissioner.

“How could I refuse such a charming request from such a charming lady?”

“You can’t. Now tell that little patrolman to get his butt in here.”

That cop would have broken Mr. Timothy Doyle’s kind heart, the little jerk. He had had his moment. He had behaved properly and selflessly. But now he had reverted to his more basic self. I could see him twenty years from now; the smug lines had begun in the corners of his young mouth. His eyes narrowed and measured me with a cool and distant wariness: who the hell was I?

“Sit down, officer. I’m Assistant District Attorney Lynne Jacobi, Bureau Chief of the Violent Sex Crimes Division.”

“Oh? I’m Police Officer Peter Delaney. Me and my partner were the first on the scene with the woman ...”

“Tell you how we’re going to do this, officer. *I’m* going to ask you a question and *you’re* going to give me an answer. Clear?”

His brows climbed slowly up his forehead and a grin played around his lips and he shrugged. He still didn’t have the vaguest idea who I was; *he* was the hero of the moment.

“Where did that blood come from, officer? That blood that’s smeared on your mouth?”

His hand reached up and his fingertips delicately traced the evidence of his glory. “From the Sanderalee-whatever’s mouth, lady. Didn’t no one tell you about what happened?”

I leaned against a desk and folded my arms and regarded this kid from the distance of nearly twenty years; measured him; let him enjoy a few more seconds of his glory.

“Officer Delaney, don’t mess around with me, because if you do I’ll wreck you so totally, so completely that you’ll spend the next eighteen or nineteen years plucking drunks from public toilets from one end of this city to the other. And no one, sonny, no one at all, will want to see your face smeared with vomit on their front pages. You got that? You ready to sit up straight and start behaving like a professional police officer?”

He had gone a little pale; a little tighter; a lot more resentful. His fingers touched the corners of his mouth again.

“Look, lady, I ...”

“Chief. You call me *Chief*, because that’s my title. Got it?”

“Yes, sir. Uh-uh-Chief. I’m ... well, you see, me and my partner were the first on the scene and ...”

“No, we’ll get to all that when I ask you. You tell me where that blood came from that’s on your mouth right now. Or you want me to tell you how it happened? Did someone out there say ‘He officer, show us how it was’? Did someone suggest you dip your eager little fingers into the blood on your tunic and smear it on your mouth so it would look more dramatic for the cameras?”

Right on target. The kid started to fall apart. I let him because he had it coming, even though it wasn’t totally his fault.

“All right. Now we’re being honest with each other, Police Officer Delaney. You will speak to no one without the permission of someone from my office, whether it be me or one of my subordinates. Got it? Good. Now, I spotted a washbasin over there behind the screen. Go over and wash your face, then come back here and show me your memo book.”

“My memo book?”

“You haven’t filled in your memo book? You were too busy giving press conferences? Where’s your partner?”

“He stayed with the chick. He went in the ambulance up to New York Hospital.”

“He went with the ‘victim.’ He went with *Ms. Sanderalee Dawson*. She is not a ‘chick.’ You got a way to go, officer. For God’s sake, close your mouth and wash your face.”

It took another five minutes to discover that at no time, from the moment he and his partner had entered that blood-awful kitchen until she had been taken on a stretcher out of his sight, had Sanderalee said one single word. She had only made groaning, cackling sounds.

“Why do you suppose your partner stayed with her in the ambulance on the way here? And in the ambulance when she was being transferred? Why do you think he did that, officer?”

He blinked, then nodded. “In case she says something? In case she comes to and says something of value?”

“You got it. Officer, you stay in here all by yourself and you write up your memo book. I want you to put down the exact times involved; the exact moves you made; what you saw. Everything. Put it in your memo book, not on the front page of the *New York Post* or the *Daily News*. You took very commendable action tonight. You very likely saved Ms. Dawson’s life, if she survives all this. You don’t mean zilch to those people out there. You’re good for a picture, that’s it. They really don’t give a damn if you put your career in jeopardy by giving out information you should not give out. You are tomorrow’s front page to them. Period.”

His face lit up. “Jeez. You think I might have my picture on the front page of the *New York Post* tomorrow? Jeez.”

CHAPTER 4

THE CHAOS AND EXCITEMENT at New York Hospital was far more controlled and institutionalized. They were accustomed, at this huge uptown East Side installation, which was associated with Cornell University Medical School, to the unusual: to caring for the rich, the famous, the infamous, the exotic.

There was a Briefing Room and all the control of a Presidential Press Conference as a spokesman for the hospital fielded questions from media people and “interested parties.”

The medical bulletin was brief and nonexplicit. Surgery was in progress at this very moment. Microsurgery of the most delicate kind. Involving the attempted reattachment of Ms. Dawson's severed left hand.

“It looks good as of right now,” the bland hospital spokesman said. “The severed hand was kept under optimal conditions. Surgery commenced approximately ten minutes ago; the three-man surgical team of Doctors David Cohen, Adam Waverly and Frank Esposito is in service.” How long would the surgery take? “That depends. However long is necessary.” What about Ms. Dawson's other injuries? “I cannot comment in any detail at this time.”

Chief of Detectives Jim Barrow stood head and shoulders over the milling crowd. He extricated himself from several worried-looking television types and signaled me to a corner in the back of the room.

“I got your note about Timothy Doyle's handling of the cold water faucet, Lynne. Thanks. We've printed him and checked it out. That'll save us something, anyway.” He turned and faced into the room. “Behold the glamorous people. That little clique around the doctor are network executives. One of them actually asked if it would be advisable to cancel Sanderalee's live show tonight.”

“God, she's really wiped out,” we overheard. “I mean, there goes the whole bloody sweeps week right down the old toilet.”

Jim Barrow winked at me. “Nice, huh? That bitch up there has really let them all down.”

“And in a rating sweeps week,” I added. “Terrible. Listen, Jim, I'm going to assign a full staff to this assault. And either Bobby Jones or Lucy Capella—you know my investigator, Lucy Capella?”

“Little dark-haired girl, used to be a nun?”

“That's Lucy. Either or both of them will be my liaisons. Where are we at right now?”

Detectives were tracking down and interviewing all of the guests on Sanderalee Dawson's talk show of last night; members of her crew; her chauffeur; her neighbors; street people who might have seen her assailant.

“And we're starting at scratch with a big fat Rolodex of names of her contacts: friend and foe. The lady has collected a lot of both over the last few years. Especially over the last six months, when she's gone slightly wacko politically. Listen, kiddo, I have my guys doing floor plans and sketches and

the usual up at her apartment. We're gonna seal it for the present, but if you want access just let me know and I'll leave word."

Barrow knew me; I always found it valuable to return to the scene of the crime—if it was an indoor setting—long after everyone had gone. I found it valuable to wander around, to get the feel of the place: to absorb it totally, so that months later, maybe even years later, I could reconstruct accurately in a courtroom, presenting the jury with more than technically correct perfect-to-scale floor plans.

"Good, Jim. Thanks, yes, I'll want to do that. What the hell is all that commotion?"

There was a soft, heavy purring sound emanating from groups of white-uniformed hospital personnel: nurses and doctors, suddenly transformed into movie fans. All were focused on the smaller-than-life-sized but terribly intense figure of Eric Roe, seethingly inarticulate movie star of the moment. He swept majestically into the crowded room with his entourage of flacks who chanted "C'mon now, girls, don't crowd Eric. Give him a break, kids. Eric's a friend of Sanderalee, so no autographs, have a heart, can't you see Mr. Roe is very distressed."

Mr. Roe stayed around long enough to be photographed being very distressed and then he and his drumbeaters were gone. There was an excitement in the room: who's going to be next? Paul Newman? Naw, he don't know Sanderalee. Does he? Hey, look, there's what's-his-name, the singer.

The cameramen flashed on anybody who might be somebody. After all, this was salable stuff all over the world.

"C'mon Lynne," Barrow said, "I'll buy you a cup of coffee. Let's get the hell out of here before we both get arrested."

CHAPTER 5

JIM BARROW GAVE ME a lift back to my apartment. He couldn't resist commenting on the beauty of the rising sun, the unique cloud formations over the East River, and the anticipated number of winter murdered bodies that would start bobbing up once the thaw was definitely over.

"I like the sunrise in the cloud-swept skies part, Jim. Thanks for the lift. I'll be at my office in an hour or so or I'll leave a number where I can be reached."

"Sure you don't want me to come upstairs with you and warm you up a little, babe?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Jim, here's exactly what I'd like you to do." I leaned over and whispered terrible and dirty things in his ear. He pulled back startled, then laughed.

"You young women of today. My God!"

Hot shower—cold shower, towel wrapped around my head as I rushed to answer the expected excited tapping at my door. Sometimes I cannot quite believe what has happened to my living room years ago, I literally "bought a room" right off the floor of Bloomingdale's and had it installed in the nice large main room of my four-room apartment overlooking Washington Square Park. Somehow through the years, Bloomie's had disappeared, been swallowed up and lost beneath the clutter of my books and periodicals and clippings and case files.

My next-door neighbor, Jhavi, was standing there, as expected. He reached up and took the towel off my head.

"Blow dry, Lynne. It's cut for blow dry." He looked around in his usual lost way at my chaotic hair. "Want me to fetch you a dryer?"

"No, no. Mine's in the bedroom. I'll get it. Turn off the coffee. The cups are set out."

I heard him fiddling at the television set, then the controlled-excited voice of the newsman telling about Sanderalee. Jhavi turned to me.

"Were you out early this morning? On this? My God, you were out on this?"

As we watched the *Today* show, Jhavi fussed and fingered my hair into place, turning the blow dryer on and off during commercials.

My next-door neighbors and closest friends in the building are what my old Aunt Belle would call "very strange people" and what are now called "gay people." Harley Alton is a powerhouse of a black man who was once a famous linebacker in New York. He now owns and operates a very successful midtown restaurant and his various other flourishing businesses, which he discusses with me periodically. While I am not his attorney—I do not moonlight—I do help him out a little. I checked up on his attorney, whom he does not trust completely and at times with good reason.

His lover is an exotic named Jhavi. I have been tempted at times to check him out and find

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