Precious Metals

by AQLM

Summary

Jane and Maura must unravel their feelings for each other while unraveling a strange case of murder, metals, and malfeasance. Heavy-duty Rizzles and rather smutty.

Takes place somewhere between 4x05 (Dance with the Devil) and 4x07 (All for One).
Confusion and Desire

Truth to be told, Jane actually didn’t mind the long drawn out explanations Maura liked to include with even simple statements of fact. And it wasn’t just because Jane had managed to parlay that information into a handful of won bets and bar trivia successes. It was that she actually appreciated that Maura had taken the time and energy to learn so much about the world and that, even more wonderfully, Maura saw fit to share that information unbidden with her best friend. Really what got to the brown haired detective was that Maura did not know when such information was appreciated and when the presence of a scientific or archaeological monologue could very well interfere with catching her murderer. In general, though, the content did not disturb her. The delivery, so matter of fact and intellectual, actually entertained Jane more than it caused her aggravation no matter how much she liked to play out that emotion.

It was the case today that the same explanation and calm, scientific demeanor was informing her of something she very much did not want to hear or experience.

The petite blonde sat upright in Jane’s bed, the edge of the thick white comforter wrapped around her chest, giving a tantalizing view of the edges of her breasts above the line of the draping. One hand kept the coverlet in place while the other was giving slow, explanatory hand gestures, as if she were indicating the etiology of an unusual word that she’d pulled out just for the occasion. In this case, she was not discussing tribal rituals surrounding communal lunches or the history of archery in Massachusetts. Today, it was a logical and organized explanation of why she and Jane should not sleep together again.

“… And it’s not uncommon for young women in college to indulge and explore previously on explored regions of their sexuality. There’s something very freeing about being away from home for the first time and, as I saw with many of my female companions, in the absence of heterosexual stimulation, they chose instead to achieve enjoyment through experiences with the female gender. However…”

Jane was focusing in and out on the words. She herself was half wrapped in a blanket, though she let it fall so she was naked from the waist up. Her dark curly hair spilled over her shoulders in a cascade that, not more than a half hour ago, Maura had so happily pulled towards her. Jane shuddered as she remembered Maura’s fingers interlaced in the curls as she pressed Jane’s face into her body and whispered, then screamed, Jane’s name as her tongue found the sweet, hot center of Maura’s sex. That passion has now evaporated and the lecture given in front of her might as well have been administered to a conference of people interested in researching the sex lives of heterosexual women who have just their first lesbian experience.

“And you’re not listening to anything I’m telling you,” said Maura, a sigh escaping her lips. She tilted her head and her dirty blonde hair shaded her face. Jane recognized the expression as one of resignation and even loneliness, as if Maura where back in a space where people did not want to talk to her being here. All her life Maura had been too intellectual and too distant. It was only in the care of Jane and the rest of the Boston Police Department that she had truly begun to flourish. After all, all of them respected her and looked up to her. Korsak especially seemed enamored of her ability to come up with a scientific her esoteric explanation for everything around. At times like this, when the person she wanted most to listen to her didn’t, she retreated to that unsure child. It stabbed Jane to the heart when they were at work and stabbed just as painfully right now. Jane herself was shaken and taken aback so she did a poor job, she admitted to herself, of attempting to reassure her friend.

“Maura. Please. You know I hate… I don’t understand. Half hour ago you seem to be enjoying
yourself and now you’re telling me that this was all a terrible mistake? Did this mean nothing to you?” Her husky voice raised in shocked anger, well, an anger that was more sadness. Had she been so misled that she took advantage of someone who did not want it? A cold spark of fear formed in her stomach. She didn’t have time to fully contemplate that before Maura reached out that one free hand and placed it lightly around Jane’s rest.


“Sexual relations,” interrupted Jane, gesturing outward with her free hand, her face in an open scowl. “What, you’re giving a court deposition now? Do you need to explain to the jury what relations you had?”

A subtle eye roll cut off Jane’s small rant and she let Maura continue.

“As I said, I was happy to be here. The experience was exceptionally pleasurable. I would need to check my diaries but if I recall my data correctly, this would certainly rank in the top fifteen, maybe even the top ten sexual encounters of my adult dating life.”

Jane blinked several times, scrunched her nose, and peered at her friend. “Wait, you keep a log of people you have sex with? Like a sign in book at the police station, with dates and times?”

Maura shrugged, letting another lock of hair drape past her pale shoulder. “I find it helpful to journal my sexual encounters so I can empirically determine what techniques brought me to the strongest orgasms and which were suboptimal or even unpleasant. That way, I could effectively guide my partners towards actions that were desirable versus those I found displeasing, while still allowing for individual experimentation of course.”

Jane leaned back in awe. “You’ve been chronicling your sex life so you can get off more effectively? For how long?”

The other woman tilted her head up to the left, a gesture Jane had learned (from Maura, of course) meant she was recalling rather than lying.

“I began the process after several deeply unsatisfying sexual encounters in college.”

“You’ve been keeping records for almost 20 years? Jesus Christ Maura. You keep better records than we do at the station.” Jane imagined neat piles of white cardboard file boxes stacked in the back of a closet that Jane had somehow never seen before. She was also stunned to learn Maura had any sort of casual sex, but that would be a different conversation. If the two of them kept speaking after this, of course.

Maura nodded her head, then looked a little bashful. “Well, there have been more murders in Boston over the past 20 years than I have....” She cut off the rest of the comment and kept blushing.

“Using these data, I estimate I can achieve orgasm, or as you say, “get off” in 60% of new partner first encounters and 93% of subsequent encounters, assuming a small margin of error for things like unexpected termination of intercourse due to interruptions from work, premature ejaculation…”

As Maura went on to recount all the ways a sexual encounter could end up as a “margin of error,” Jane recalled how they spent the last two hours. She remembered Maura guiding her hands onto her breasts, how the smaller woman arched as Jane had explored each nipple with her fingertips and then her mouth. How Maura had wrapped her legs around Jane’s midsection as Jane stroked her clit and kissed along the nape of her neck. Had that all been according to some plan or were they actual expressions of desire and lust? Was this all a script according to Maura’s book?
Jane’s face drooped and Maura must have noticed. The hand on her wrist squeezed tighter. “As you are my first female partner, I did not have any specific data with which to work, so I mentally aggregated similar situations and proceeded as such. Based on what I know of you, I assumed you’d be a skilled lover, so I did not use as much intervention as I could have. But of course, I didn’t want you to end up attempting to fondle my armpit or something like that.” Her voice took on a forced levity that Jane weakly attempted to smile at. She must have been unconvincing.

Maura looked at Jane carefully, then dropped her head towards the bed. “I’ve hurt you. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

Jane withdrew in spite of herself and brought her knees up towards her chest. A defensive maneuver designed to contain the sudden vulnerability and emptiness that overtook the warmth and love they had shared so recently. As was her custom, she tried to reassure her awkward, tentative friend.

“It’s alright. I’ll be fine. It’s just…” She stared at Maura, trying to keep her emotions in check. “It’s hard knowing I was just another data point and that you were clinically directing our lovemaking. I thought it was real. Hell, it felt real. It felt amazing. But it was just an act, right? Just so I won’t ruin your percentages.”

Maura shook her head but Jane continued, “I feel like a dog you’ve trained to shake hands. For my next trick, maybe you’ll teach me to roll over.”

Maura leaned forward suddenly and put her hands on Jane’s shoulders, allowing the blanket to fall away from her curving body, all freckles, round breasts and pale skin.

“It was not an act. Nothing with you, nothing emotional, nothing physical, nothing…anything…is unreal with you. You know I can’t lie but I am good at hiding. I’ve always needed to be good. I was raised to close myself off. You are the exception.” She touched her forehead to Jane’s. “You let me be vulnerable and you don’t exploit it. I would not repay that with artifice.”

Jane didn’t respond and glanced at the clock beside them. Forty minutes ago, this posture would have led to Jane’s reaching out and pulling Maura closer, kissing her passionately and trying to convince her to go another round. Now, it felt uncomfortable.

“It’s fine. I shouldn’t be surprised that my friend, the eminent scientist and medical examiner Dr. Isles, would do anything less than make a chart and ranking system of everyone she’s ever fucked.” Maura winced at the profanity. She almost never used it and Jane’s letting loose signaled how frustrated she was. “And hey, 60% is amazing. I know guys who I can’t get to do that after a few months of dating. But you have it down to a literal science.”

Maura stroked the side of Jane’s face with the back of her hand. “You were wonderful,” she said gently. “You were everything I wanted. No data needed.”

“So why are you saying we shouldn’t do this again?” Jane inched back and Maura took the cue to sit on the bed again and, after a moment’s thought, lightly hop on to the floor where she had tossed her clothing. “I remember your saying something about it being a bad idea. How does it work again? You want something so you shouldn’t have it? I didn’t know you were a practicing Catholic.”

Jane watched Maura’s curving body scoop up her bra and panties and slide them on neatly. The clothes had been removed in a loving, careful seduction that had seen Jane undress her friend inch by inch, letting Maura in turn play with Jane’s hungry body through her clothing and eventually underneath. It had taken every inch of her police training and newly developed self-control not to ravage Maura utterly. She wanted her friend to feel her need and desire; even worship. But, Jane reminded herself, that was apparently a calculation.
Maura hooked her bra into place and readjusted her breasts to fill the cups. “You are lucky enough to have a job you love and a boyfriend who, in spite of your current distance, is absolutely devoted to you. Given that Casey is rapidly advancing to the peak of his military career, I do not want to provide another obstacle for you to consider if he asks you to move with him. And I don’t want to restrict you from pursuing your dreams if I decide to take a position elsewhere.” She shrugged herself into a silk blouse and aligned the buttons with a doctor’s precision, sliding each one into the hole.

“You deserve the chance to be whatever you want, wherever you want. Having sex with me will merely stand in the way.”

Jane rubbed the side of her nose and stared at her friend. Why where they having this fight? Where had everything gone so wrong? “First of all, I don’t see you retiring from being the Boston medical examiner unless you are forced out at gunpoint or recruited by the UN to conduct autopsies in a war zone. Second of all, I don’t understand how having sex with you matters? I think of you when I make choices now but it’s not the only deciding factor. Nothing is.”

Jane slid out of bed and tried to take Maura in her arms. The smaller woman slid aside, leaving Jane able to only place her hand on Maura’s shoulder. “You are my family, Maura.”

Maura zipped up her pants and made a show of smoothing out creases only she could detect. “The Polahi nomadic tribe in Indonesia’s Gorontalo province practices first-degree relative incest because the tribe is so small. They are unique in that lack of prohibition, though. Most—“

“You know what I mean,” said Jane in a frustrated huff. When Maura was concealing her emotions, she became supremely scientific and professorial. The lecture on Maura’s log book, the data check, and now her anthropological dialogue all served to push Jane away from her emotionally and force Jane to break down the intellectual boundaries Maura was throwing up second by second. As usual, Maura succeeded in derailing the conversation enough to almost trivialize what Jane said.

The scientist turned away from Jane to search the floor. “I do. But you know my experience with family. I do not want to jeopardize what I have now.”

Jane thought of Maura’s father, whose selflessness devotion to his daughter was borne out of a desire to cling to his ex-lover, of Maura’s biological mother, whose ties were tenuous and of late driven by a need for Maura’s kidney, and even Maura’s adoptive parents, whose love was a distant and intellectual sort.

“Maura, you know my mom, Frankie…” Jane threw up her hands and Maura slid on a pair of heels, boosting her height by a good three inches. “We are all your family. I know they would accept…”

“Please, Jane. I’ve made my decision. Do not force me to defend myself further.” There was a shivering tremble in her voice that filled Jane was a raw ache. Under the best of circumstances hearing Maura start to cry was painful, especially when she was so upset she wouldn’t let Jane take care of her, but now, after everything they shared? It was a sort of torture, as bad as when Hoyt was running his scalpel over Maura’s neck while Jane was helpless to prevent it. Worse, since the only person to turn the scalpel on would be herself. Why couldn’t they go back an hour when Maura wanted her touch and Jane reciprocated her need?

“Of course. I’m sorry. Listen. Let me walk you out?” Maura turned her head and gave a miserable short nod, and Jane have no trouble imagining the thin clear tracks of tears that were winding her way down her friends beautiful features. But hey, they had several years of Jane needing to keep from touching her friend when Maura was suffering and being forced to give verbal reassurance when physical ones what she would have preferred. So if Maura wanted to be walked to the door in silence, that was what Jane would do.
She grabbed a robe and two of them left the bedroom, walked across the cluttered expanse of the front room, and reached the door. Jane fumbled the lock and chain, hoping that every tiny bit of clattering metal might sound an alarm in Maura’s head that she was making a terrible mistake. Maura happily turned the doorknob and stepped into the hallway.

She locked eyes with Jane and forced a smile that didn’t reach her red-tinged eyes. “I’ll see you Monday, Jane.” She hesitated. “Thank you. I mean it.” A small hand reached out and traced the upper edge Jane’s news, along her cheek bone and to the side of her head. Jane fought the urge to chase the hand with her mouth. “Have a good night,” Maura added quickly, withdrew, and fled down the hall.

Jane locked the door, wandered over to the couch, and flopped down on it sadly. Joe Friday woke up from her pile of cushions in the corner and trotted over to her mistress’ lap, then placed her shaggy head down on Jane’s knee. The police officer mussed her fur and tried to figure out where everything had gone so wrong after being so right. But it was just an exercise in self torture, enough like others that it didn’t last long enough to keep her from falling asleep.

Maura distracted herself on the ride home with a through listing of the tendons of the body, starting with the ligamentum flavum and working her way distal, anterior, and then medial again. It was something she did whenever she needed to put her mind at ease. After all, ligaments were orderly and held things together. They made movement possible. They made life possible. Never mind that she rarely had to name more than a single muscle and it was usually somewhere in the thorax. Nothing like keeping the brain fresh when trying to keep a tight rein on her emotions.

She pushed open the door to the guest house and found Angela sitting at the long bar, her glasses on the tip of her long nose and a half-finished glass of red wine sitting next to her. She appeared to be poring over a book that Maura recognized as one of the more tawdry romance novels that had hit the best seller list. Maura could of course never admit to being fascinated with the topic, especially since the sexual descriptions were arousing. It allowed her a bit of variety in her usual sexual fantasies, which she admitted were relatively run of the mill, without the shame of buying a pornographic magazine. But she also liked how the plots all lined up. Man and woman meet. Man and woman love. Man and woman have falling out that barely affects their emotions for each other besides giving them a chance to reflect on their lust and love. Man and woman rejoin and marry. So perfect. Unlike…well, there were still more ligaments and she could start on tendons.

“How was your hot date,” crowed Angela, slipping a napkin into her place and closing the hardcover firmly. The plastic wrinkled slightly and the cover clapped shut with a thud. “I didn’t expect you home so early?’

“How…date,” replied Maura. She didn’t want to lie, she reminded herself. Hives. But she couldn’t really say the truth. “What makes you think I had a hot date?”

“You shoes,” replied Angela. She pointed towards the three inch tall stilettos gracing Maura’s legs. “You only wear those shoes when you’re expecting a gentleman caller, as we used to say.” Her thick brown eyebrows worked overtime on her face, implying overtly what she was pretending was covert. “Or when you are expecting to have a bit of a sleepover.” Her face broke into a conspiratorial grin.

“Oh, these,” she looked down at the loud orange heels, adorned with a circle of rhinestones. She had chosen them especially to complement her actual date’s impressive height. “Well, I just bought a new blouse and I haven’t had time to fully coordinate my wardrobe…” She felt an itchy bump rise up on the back of her neck.
Angela leapt on the lie. “You mean to say Dr. Maura Isles, the most organized woman I know, who has ordered her entire closet by color, size, country of origin, and relative dressiness could not find a particular set of heels and…happened,” she leaned on the word, “to end up with the shoes I only see out when you go on dates?”

Maura sighed, walked forward, and put her bag on the counter. Angela was accurate though Maura could not divulge the reality of her evening. She couldn’t be sure Jane’s mother would not be mortally wounded by the news that her daughter had participated in a lesbian fling with her best friend. Maura tried to hedge her bets. Some truth was always better than no truth at all, right?

“You are correct in observing they do provide a certain amount of height and shapeliness to my legs that many men find attractive. And…yes,” she admitted. “I did have a date tonight. But it wasn’t that hot,” she added quickly.

“I knew it,” Angela all but shouted, then took another swig of her wine. Maura looked over and grimaced. The bottle was almost empty and the label was from a vineyard Maura knew for a fact had burned down a few years ago, making the vintage exceptionally rare. But this was her guest.

Jane’s mother was too busy enjoying the wine to notice Maura’s annoyance. “So, what happened? Was he a cad? Too forceful? Live with his parents?”

Maura looked aside, then walked over the couch and made a show of rearranging the pillows. They were neat and crisply placed as per Angela’s specifications, for the woman’s taste was not always on point but her staging often was accurate.

“Actually, I was stood up.” She couldn’t look Angela in the face and admit her humiliation, the trigger for the rest of the night’s activities.

“Oh Maura, sweetie, that’s awful.” Maura heard Angela stand up and walk over to her. She tugged Maura into sitting on the couch and took out one of the folded blankets from underneath, tucking it around the smaller woman in a gesture of obviously maternal affection. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not really,” replied Maura. She drooped her head towards her lap.

Angela pressed on. “Come on. You’ll feel better if you tell me,” she said in a sing-song tone. Maura wished she had Jane’s confidence. She could hear her best friend responding in that same tone, “No I wonnn’t,” as a way of shutting down her over-inquisitive mother. But Maura had no such resistance and perhaps an ear was welcome.

“His name was Willian Fornier,” she began. “He preferred to be called Bill and was quite adamant that I use that name whenever we spoke prior to today. I met him at a pathology conference three weeks ago in Texas.”

“Oh, right, I think Jane mentioned you’d met a man down there. Well, it was very nice for him to come up to see you. But what happened?”

Maura had been rather excited when she returned from San Antonio, filled with stories of all the new techniques in extracting biological materials from insects and other wild animals that had eaten cadavers. The sheer number of horrible vomiting sounds Jane had made in response forced Maura to change the topic of conversation to Bill. Jane seemed less disgusted by the man, though she was not nearly as happy Maura was to find someone who could accurately detect and appreciate decomp the way Maura did.
She wasn’t his type, he’d confessed at the conference, but he found her so alluring and different that he just had to get to know her better. He was of course her type: tall, sandy haired and green eyed, a bit of scruff that appeared in a handsome, manly way at the end of the day. His shirts had been silk, his suits Armani. She had been taken aback by the force of his come-on and the way he subtly worked her into being around him as often as possible. She’d been down there for four days and they had spent almost every minute together. It had been a beautiful whirlwind that she hadn’t wanted to leave.

And the sex was equally whirlwind. He had been forceful and possessive, tossing her body around and moving her limbs to give him the most access, heedless of her pleasure. She wasn’t always so quick to bed a man but this time it was all she wanted. So when he proposed a second tryst, this time in Boston, she had been all too eager.

“I…don’t know,” she said. A lump formed in her throat. “I made the hotel reservations. I got us a table at the Capital Grill. I sent a taxi to the airport and I know he arrived safely. But when I arrived at the restaurant, he wasn’t there.”

“But sweetie,” interrupted Angela. “He’s also a doctor. Why are you paying for all of his expenses?”

“Well, it was the least I could do,” Maura replied. “I mean, he did pay to come visit and he said he’d reimburse me when it was time to pay the check.” The lump didn’t dissolve.

“I…I waited for thirty minutes alone in the restaurant. I called him twice and it went right to voicemail. I even called his office and had him paged.” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “Eventually, the maître de came over with a note. Bill had called the restaurant for me.”

“What was his excuse,” Angela demanded. Jane had asked almost the same thing. Her voice was just as furious. Her tone was just as compassionate. The two women, mother and daughter, were more alike when they cared to admit, especially when it came to Maura.

“He just said I wasn’t his type. That was it.” The note, written in a hasty script on the restaurant stationary, was not something she would have anticipated in a million years. It had been so abrupt that Maura had nearly broke down from shame right there. She knew the waiters had been whispering about the woman who planned a romantic dinner but who sat alone while her appetizer congealed in front of her. She had waved them off over a dozen times as they tried to bring her wine or more food and she had replied, more nervously and with less conviction every time, that she was waiting for someone.

“What did you do,” said Angela. Her voice was still angry, but softer. She reached out and squeezed Maura’s hand.

“I…called the hotel and tried to cancel the reservation, but it was too late to get a refund. I did describe what he looked like, though, and I asked them to make sure he didn’t stay the night.”

“Good,” said Angela firmly.

“Then I paid for dinner, or at least tried to. They felt so badly for me that they gave me the whole meal on the house. Apparently I was so…pathetic that they couldn’t make me pay.”

“Oh sweetie, you’re not pathetic at all. What do you care that some guy who calls himself Bill, like he was some sort of…” she fumbled for the word, “car mechanic instead of a doctor decided to be a total ass. You’re not his type? That’s because you’re too good.”

Maura repressed tears with a sad smile. “That’s just what Jane said. Well, with a bit more profanity. I
went there afterward and we had dinner.”

Jane above all over knew the deep insecurities that Maura held about her likeableness, her ability to make friends, and her fears of being alone for the rest of her life because of her social awkwardness. Being abandoned in such a hard way had brought every one of those fears to the surface and Jane had spent several…Maura admitted to herself…wonderful minutes hugging Maura and trying to convince her otherwise.

Angela gave a snort. “Well, I may not like her language but my daughter is right about you and I hope you listened! It’s going to take a special type of man to understand and appreciate you. You’re like…” she looked upwards, shook her head, and grimaced. Her gold hoop earrings glinted in the light. “You’re like an aged Romano, the kind of stuff they don’t serve at restaurants because it’s too sharp.”

Maura shook her head. “So food that no one wants to eat?”

“That’s because most people don’t know how to cook with it,” retorted Angela. “And it’s a shame to waste it on people whose idea of a good cheese is that sawdust they call Parmesan.” Angela all but spat out the word. “You need someone who can appreciate your…uniqueness. Your flavor. You keep finding men who like American cheese, Maura. You need a gourmand.”

Maura nodded. “Thank you, Angela.” The metaphor had stretched as far as it would go, she hoped. “I should get to bed, though. I need to catch up on paperwork tomorrow.”

Angela gave her a shoulder squeeze. “Of course. Sleep well. And remember,” she warned, standing up and gathering the blankets back together. “Just because something happens today does not mean it will happen every day. The right person is there.”

“I hope so,” Maura replied, and made her way upstairs, now letting a few tears flow, safe from another set of eyes.

Within her bedroom, she performed her nightly ritual. First, she carefully cataloged the items in her purse, ensuring each tube of lipstick was capped firmly, all change placed in a porcelain shell on her dresser, and her phone plugged in on her nightstand. A message showed on its screen, one she hadn’t noticed in the hours since she left the restaurant. It was a single line from Bill, sent thirty minutes after she left the restaurant. “I’ve reconsidered. Call for the best night you’ll have in months.” Then, another 30 minutes later. “Remember I’ve had you already. I know what makes you tick.” And finally, “You know no one else will find you attractive.” She gave a snort and deleted the messages.

Finally, Maura disrobed and realized she still smelled faintly of sex as she slipped off her panties and threw them in the clothes hamper. Thank god Angela hadn’t said anything. It made the little deception easier. Then again, Maura told herself as she moved the blouse and skirt into the dry cleaning container, Maura did have a finer-trained nose than the average person. The scent was undetectable to the untrained, she decided.

Maura ran the shower in the master bathroom and a few cold minutes later, stepped into the stream. As she washed, she ran her fingers over a few tiny red lines, marks of passion Jane had left on her as she ravaged…Maura shook her head under the stream. Ravaged was imprecise. Claimed was closer. That had been the word she wanted, the passion coming forth as a gift to Maura. She ran her fingertips over the scratches, noting the secondary clotting mechanism that had already come into place. They were not deep enough to scar and they were unlikely to become infected. She patted at them gently with a washcloth to avoid disturbing the scabs.
Maura closed her eyes and began to run the floral shampoo through her hair. She didn’t want to recall the encounter but knew she would need to journal it later. Best to organize her thoughts now, right? But even after she finished her second wash and added her conditioner, she couldn’t bring herself to reimagine what she had done with Jane. The emotion preoccupying her was that isolation and humiliation she had felt in the restaurant. Was that more important to her, she tried asking herself, than the act of making love? No answer was forthcoming. Ordinarily she might use the shower to continue her contemplation but she was hit with a wave of exhaustion. She turned off the shower, finished her toilette, and slipped into a pair of blue-grey silk pajamas.

She reached into the top of her closet where she kept her jewelry safe, or at least, that was what she told everyone who asked. She placed her earrings within and removed her journal, the one she had told Jane about when she was leaving. It was a white, soft-covered book edged with gold leaf. It had been intended as some sort of private inventory of her thoughts, but she lived in fear of someone discovering what she was actually thinking. Somehow, a catalog of her lovers and experiences was less revealing. She had been cautious to keep it a secret from every one with whom she had shared a bed. Too tempting a prize, she knew, for the average male ego. She began storing it in the safe when one gentleman had caught a glimpse and tried to wrest it from her, only dissuaded when she afforded him a glimpse and explained it was a diary of, “female related occurrences”. Sure enough, male squeamishness as anything related to her menstrual cycle had spurred his instant disinterest. And it was not enough of a lie to trigger hives! From then on, though, she’d locked up the book and made her notes when she knew no one was watching.

She opened it up to the most recent entry. That from Bill. She glanced at the columns and appraised her encounter. Zero orgasms, she noted, and zero acts of foreplay or cunnilingus. He had been insistent on her performing oral sex on him, which she did with some expectation of reciprocity. None was forthcoming. He instead had then engaged in acrobatic sex that left her, she noted, unsatisfied. Perhaps it was best he didn’t sleep with her again. She had been so caught up in his energy that she’d neglected her own needs. It was unlike her.

From within her nightstand she retrieved a gold ringed black pen. It was an expensive make she had received after she graduated medical school. It wrote smoothly in the way she expected a doctor would write. Confident. Assured. Cleanly. Well, writing prescriptions would never be something she did as a medical examiner but it somehow fit the task.

She removed the pen cap, then hesitated. The act suddenly seemed so crass. What she had done with Jane had been, she clenched her jaw and swallowed hard, so beautiful and special that it didn’t belong on the same page as that last encounter. She used her executive decision making and a bit of scientific explanation. It was a different form of encounter, so it should have its own page. She drew a dashed line under William’s name and turned to the next page, where the appropriate headings were waiting for her input.

Maura took a breath, then wrote on the first empty line, “Jane Rizzoli” in a solid, fluid motion. She moved over to the next column, labeled “orgasms”. She wrote in a stylized number four, then let the pen sit on the page. A pool of ink formed at the nib and she pulled the pen up again, then capped it. She grabbed a tissue and blotted up the excess ink, but it smeared a little anyway. The ink ran into the next columns and, as Maura looked ahead, soaked through into seven pages. A suspicious person would call this a sign but Maura suspected it was an indication of her exhaustion. Clearly, this would have to wait until tomorrow.

She tucked herself into bed and let her dreams take her. They were, blessedly, of neither Jane nor Bill. They were of ligaments and tendons, perfect lines of flesh to hold everything together.
The weekend passed without event, at least where Jane was concerned. She had spent a frustrating amount of time alone in her apartment, trying to clean out all the signs of the time she spent with Maura. Two glasses of water perched on either side of her bed. Containers of pasta that had been put away just enough to keep from triggering Maura’s exceptionally neat side, now needing to be repackaged into a more durable form. Pots she had shoved into the dishwasher before they were properly soaked, again to get them off the table to appease Maura, were now being scoured with all of Jane’s frustration.

Certainly Maura had wanted Jane enough to clean her kitchen in the most cursory way possible. They couldn’t just have retired to the bedroom. Oh no, in between that opening kiss and their lovemaking had to be a quick round of cleaning. The dishes had to go away. The pasta had to be covered. But Jane had whispered things in Maura’s ear and run her fingertips up and down her bare arms enough times to fully memorize the patterns of goosebumps. Maura had wrapped herself around Jane and pressed her against the refrigerator for a passionate, deep kiss that had sent Jane’s head spinning. God, she didn’t know Maura could be like that, so…much. So free. Jane gritted her teeth and ran another burst of hot water over the copper bottom of the saucepan. How had it gone so damn wrong?

She recounted the night: they had been talking, right? Maura had come over after her non-date with some asshole and was feeling rightfully sorry for herself. What had Jane done? Feed her, of course. Jane had been throwing together a last minute pasta with meat sauce and some leftover greens in an approximation of something her mother wouldn’t hate if ma showed up at the door. Hell, Jane half expected it when the doorbell rang as she was banging the sauce off the spoon. But when she was wiping the food off her hands and popped open her door, it was Maura, dressed perfectly and looking far from perfect.

Bill. Some guy. He had hurt her friend and dear one in the way Maura tended to fear the most: made her feel like a social nobody and an outcast. Made her forget she was a brilliant, beautiful, successful, compassionate woman and instead reduced her to the girl in boarding school who ate her lunch alone with a textbook to hide from her loneliness. It enraged Jane almost as much as every villain who had tried to hurt Maura. Not as much as Dennis when he tried to murder Maura, of course, but enough that she swore she’d get her pals at the police to track this guy down and arrest him on something they made up. Maura demurred. Another sign of her good nature.

There had been a few moments of physical reassurance before Maura brushed her off and Jane resumed cooking. Maura sat there, toying with the plates and silverware, trying to be distracting by giving the history of cutlery evolution in the Middle Ages until Jane shut down the line of discussion with a snark. Not too hard. Enough to bring Maura to that frustrated but tolerant tone that Jane recognized so well. And then they ate, quietly.

Jane stopped scrubbing and itched her forehead, leaving what she was sure was a rusty smear of soap across her olive skin. When had it been during the meal when things had changed? She put her hands down on the sink and let the scouring pad into the basin, then let out a breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding. It seemed so sudden and yet so…Maura. Calculated, Jane recognized, but then pushed it aside. Maura was calculating when it came to sex, or so she said, but Jane recognized in retrospect a defense when she saw it. Trying to dismiss the intimacy with mechanics was classic Maura. Jane had been too hurt to see it.

Maura had finished the plate of pasta and walked to the sink, rinsed it, and put it in the dishwasher. Jane hadn’t finished but she recognized the sound of her dishwasher being rearranged into Maura’s nigh military precision. Jane let out a snort that flung a fragment of sauce onto the plate, an act Maura had blessedly not witnessed. It would have led, after all, to a discussion of Einstienella or whatever bacteria lived in her mouth.
Maura had noticed the laugh and replied, “What? You think it’s funny that I optimize your dishwasher so you don’t have to do more work later? You think it’s funny that I want to make my best friend happy so she doesn’t have to do a chore she hates?” A hurt had ended up in her voice that Jane didn’t like at all. Jane had swallowed quickly, the ball of pasta pushing past the lump in her throat as Jane all but fled to Maura’s side.

“No, not at all. It’s funny that you do this even when you know I wouldn’t do it. It’s funny that you…care about these things in spite of the world not.” Jane didn’t like the words coming out of her mouth, so she put her hands on Maura’s shoulders and turned the smaller woman around to face her. “Maura, sometimes I laugh because I don’t know what else to do. You are so different than everything else in my life and I can’t believe I get to be around you.” Maura didn’t look up. Jane tried to stop floundering for words. “You’re like an exotic…bird who landed on my window instead of a pigeon…and I…need to stop,” sighed Jane. The floundering continued, at least she thought so.

“Thank you for caring about my dishes. Thank you for being organized. Thank you for being part of my life and trying to make it better. And anyone who doesn’t see how special those things make you doesn’t deserve you.”

Maura had shrugged off Jane’s hands and looked up at her friend, her blue-hazel eyes holding a gleam she’d never seen before.

“By that logic, the only person who deserves me is you.”

And then the kiss. Maura’s mouth pressed against Jane and for a split second Jane contemplated breaking contact. Then there was another moment of determining whether Maura was inebriated so as to avoid anything seedy. Then there was a reminder that Maura was struggling with being rejected and giving any indication she wasn’t enjoying this would be terrible. And then there were several seconds of absolutely relishing every blissful moment of contact as Maura gently, and then more fiercely locked herself against her friend.

She let Maura break the kiss and ease back down. Maura stood for a moment, gazing at Jane with half-lidded eyes. Then, she pivoted on a single stiletto and nearly fled towards the living room table where she had carefully placed her things.

“After a rejection that accessed deeply-held insecurities, it would be logical for me to seek confirmation of my desirability from a sympathetic second party,” began Maura, her voice attempting a scientific analysis in a tone that betrayed something akin to barely suppressed panic. “However, I should have considered the acceptability of my actions and the willingness of my partner before engaging you in an unsolicited act of physicality.”

Maura tried to grab her purse and make a rapid, face-saving exit. Instead, her shaking hands fumbled the beige leather bag. A cascade of high-end cosmetics, delicate applicators, neatly-organized receipts, and an embarrassing row of ribbed yellow condoms scattered onto the floor. Maura mumbled a rare profanity in an even rarer African language, crouched down, and began scooping her belongings back into the bag’s gaping maw.

Jane finally caught up to Maura and gently tugged her to standing. Maura, for once, did not resist. Instead she sagged backwards and let Jane wrap her arms around her. The dark haired detective was so baffled and aroused and concerned she had absolutely no idea which emotion to tackle first. Again, she adjusted her friend to face her, then reconsidered and led Maura to the couch. They sat down, facing each other. Maura pulled a pillow onto her lap and hugged it like a security blanket. She looked so absolutely pathetic that Jane moved closer until their knees were touching.

“Maura. Unsolicited is never the right word with you, unless it is advice on my health or clothing or
eating habits or….,” Jane noticed the hole she was digging herself into. “Okay, when it’s advice about me. But you are always welcome, physically, socially, and emotionally. I have never shied away from physical contact. Hell, I can’t count the number of times that I wanted to wrap you up in my arms to take care of you.”

“But you’ve never tried to kiss me before. In the United States, a hug and a kiss represent two vastly different levels of implied intimacy. Without a romantic or sexual inclination, you would never think to kiss me on the mouth. If we were in rural Australia, you might consider a lip-based kiss an acceptable form of greeting...” Maura rested her chin on the edge of the decorative pillow, still not meeting Jane’s eyes.

Jane reached out a careful hand and put it on Maura’s wrist. “I think we’d both agree you were doing a lot more than saying hi, especially since you’ve been here for almost an hour.” Jane modulated the teasing in her voice to the barest possible level. This was not the time to provoke a defensive response. “Which leaves us with the conventional Western interpretation.”

Maura didn’t respond, instead fluttering her fingers against the faux satin surface of the upholstery. Jane could see the logical wheels grinding against each other in the brilliant scientist’s head, but Maura remained silent. Jane took her own, detective-based approach.

“You have a romantic or sexual inclination towards me,” stated Jane gently.

Maura nodded, sinking further into the couch. Jane despaired of her friend wedging herself between the couch cushions and disappearing like a grumpy remote control.

Jane rifled through her brain for the correct response. Up until this moment, she hadn’t considered Maura as anything more than a best friend, yet the kiss was physically arousing and the thought of continuing their physical encounter extremely desirable. There was something absolutely alluring now about this vulnerable, suddenly sexual creature…woman…person in her apartment. So Jane took the logical step. She put a long fingertip under Maura’s chin and kissed her back. Deeply, passionately, and unhesitatingly, with the petite blonde leaning in to be more aggressive in turn. Then it was her turn to back down again.

“I think the feeling is mutual,” Jane replied.

Jane punctuated her point with another kiss. Maura didn’t pull away, yet again, but she was not as yielding. Jane stopped kissing her and watched Maura take a slow, shuddering breath. Her voice evened out to her normal scientific demeanor.

“I doubt that is the case,” replied Maura primly. “You consider yourself heterosexual, with no historical or current evidence to demonstrate otherwise. A romantic inclination towards any woman, including me, would be deeply out of character. Besides, if you had felt this way, you would have acted on it. That is how you are.”


Maura parried as Jane had hoped. “I mean you are more likely to pursue someone sexually if you sense interest in that person or if you are driven yourself. There’s nothing wrong with that, of course. I believe in sexual pursuits. I therefore believe you didn’t have this attraction you speak of. But thank you for trying to make me feel better.” Her wan smile matched her hedged words.

“Or maybe I respected you too much to make a move over a dead body,” retorted Jane. “Or
suspected you weren’t homosexual at all because of the number of men who have found their way into your bed.” She wagged her eyebrows, then let her tone soften, “Or maybe I didn’t have any way of recognizing what I felt until you helped me see it.”

Maura mulled this over. She entwined her left hand with Jane’s right and used her fingers to trace across the knuckles. Her fingers, her doctor’s hands, were so soft and so skilled. Jane found herself wondering what those hands could do. Then, to her continual amazement, she had started to become more aroused. Intensely so. Talk about recognizing new emotions.

After a few more moments, Maura replied, “We didn’t know about the connection patterns of neurons until Ramon y Cajal used his famous stain to show them. And we never would have learned about the functions of certain areas of the brain without advanced fMRIs. So…it is possible…we don’t always see something until we have the technology to detect what we’ve missed.”

Thank god for Maura’s logic and her ability to convince herself of something she was half convinced of, anyway. “See? You’re just like the Ramone in the Hall,” eliciting an eye roll of course for the deliberate butchering of the comment, “letting me see a connection I couldn’t find before.”

Maura gripped her hand tighter and looked at Jane with a ferocious intensity Jane had almost never seen. “I would very much like to kiss you more.”

“By all means,” said Jane. And then Maura leaned in to kiss her, then pushed them both horizontal on the couch. Jane noticed how light, how lithe Maura was. How her body nestled perfectly on Jane’s. How not-awkwardly-at-all Maura moved when she was making out with someone. Jane absolutely loved it. Every second. No doubts at all.

Maura’s hands began to roam over Jane’s body, though between the couch and Jane’s clothing she could do little more than trace the lines of her elbows and curve of her neck. Those were still lovely. And Jane found the small of Maura’s back, her sculpted upper body, and the softness of Maura’s lips on her own. She decided it was totally unsatisfactory.

She stopped kissing and put her hand on the side of Maura’s face. “I feel a little like I’m trying to sneak you into my parents’ house on a first date and keep them from noticing I have company.” Maura grinned. That sly smile, her flushed face and hands, and everything like that screamed that Jane was making the right choice.

They slid off the couch and Maura straightened her skirt, brushed back her hair, and surveyed the kitchen.

“But we have to clean up first,” stated the petite blonde, with calculated disapproval. “Do you know almost 100% of these buildings hold roaches? The average cockroach can live happily on the glue on the back of a postage stamp. This could feed a f-“

“Oh GROSS Maura,” all but shouted Jane. Then she did something she’d never been allowed to do before. She yanked Maura close and kissed her hard. “I swear if you talk about roaches one more time when I am trying to get you into bed, I will go back to the couch and refuse to help you take my bra off.”

Maura looked…scared for a moment. Jane cursed herself. They were moving too fast. She knew it. But Maura pushed aside her resistance. “That’s fair. And you will promise never to leave a house full of dirty dishes when I am trying to get you into bed.”

And that was how Jane came to be scrubbing her favorite pot down to the enamel. She gave the pot another wash and sighed loudly. She wasn’t any closer to an answer, though. She still didn’t
understand how the two of them had gone from flirtation to shutdown so quickly. It wasn’t a one
night stand, so she couldn’t blame lack of emotional connection. She had wanted Maura intensely,
no matter how unexpected it was. The feeling was absolutely mutual, so it wasn’t beer goggles. The
sex had been pretty damn good for a first time, if a little fumbling, but that was endearing. Jane threw
the scouring pad into the sink, stalked over to her couch, and sat down.

What the hell was she going to do? These were the kinds of problems she could pour over with
Maura, except Maura was the subject of these problems. Post-shooting Maura’s father Paddy, Jane
had sort of been able to confide in her family, Korsack, and Frost, but an act of violence wasn’t the
same as an act of sex. It was ironic, she mused, that she spent so much time around violence that they
were not bothered by a bloody body lying in a street but couldn’t talk about intercourse without
cringing. Ugh, intercourse. She sounded like Maura. So where the hell could she muse things over?

It was an act of desperation but the alternative was sitting in her apartment. She’d found her best
black and white suit, the one that had snagged Maura two dates when they swapped clothes, and did
her best to look…not out of place. Jane pulled up to the lesbian bar where she had caught the lesbian
killer all those years ago and sat in her car, then turned off the engine. She rested her head on the
steering wheel. She’d have chosen another bar but there weren’t any in the city limits and she felt
odd driving off to Woburn or Walpole or some other W-sounding named town to find people who
might understand. All she could do was hope no one recognized her. And if they did, well, she could
just be there doing research, right?

The door’s line arched nearly around the building and she sighed, getting ready to turn around and
spend the right of the night eating a pint of cherry jubilee and watching terrible police shows while
petting Joe Friday. It was infuriating to watch them do the worst police work ever while still solving
the case. Nevermind that she’d done something equally bad all the times she’d broken into something
that could have been searched with a warrant. Thank god the courts were lenient. But her backup
plan was interrupted by a shrill whistle.

“Hey. You. Lady, come over here.” A built, stocky woman with a crew cut and a Dorchester accent
gestured for Jane to come over. Jane sauntered as casually as she could to the front of the line and
stood next to the velvet rope.

“Yeah. I recognize you. I’ve seen you in the newspapers.” Jane nodded, trying to keep from slowly
backing away and triggering this woman’s likely killer instincts. “You’re the one who helped catch
Paddy Doyle.” Paddy was a legend in Dorchester and the locals often found him more appealing
than the police alternatives. She wished suddenly for her gun or a nightstick or even a really sharp
key on her key chain. This could go all sorts of poorly.

The stock woman bent forward and her voice went softer. “He got my uncle killed. Left my aunt a
widow and my cousins…they weren’t the same after that. Anyone who goes up against him deserves
to go wherever she wants.”

She leaned back and straightened up, then unclipped the velvet rope. “Go on in. VIP access on my
command. Just say Kat sent you.” A few women in the front of the line yelled and cursed their
protests. The other bouncer, a muscled young Asian woman, gave a look not out of place in a Kung
Fu movie and pushed the crowd back roughly.

“You don’t like it? You go solve crimes and get shot at,” spat Kat. “I don’t see any of you going
after murderers. Most of you couldn’t defend yourself from a fucking poodle.”

Jane recalled Maura’s admiration of poodles as brilliant animals with hypoallergenic fur, the perfect
derivative for any children who might need a dog without triggering their allergies. Wow, it was like
Maura had infested her brain with useless facts. Jane nodded at the bouncer, grateful for the woman’s
discretion about Jane’s actual reason for getting inside, and eased herself into the packed club.

The décor had shifted wildly from when Maura and Jane had gone under cover. The feel was now a bit more Dirty Robber than posh café, though not quite as worn down and grimy. Some of the furniture looked like it had been cleaned in the last century, for example. She pushed through the crowd uneasily and sought out a table. Most were occupied by couples or crowds, with the occasional woman arrayed in a way to attract the eye of a woman who might be looking that way. Jane was attracted, but not in the way she had been to Maura. Ugh. She needed to maybe stop thinking about the reason she was here.

Frustrated, she turned around and jammed herself into the bar next to two dozen other women in skirts and suits. Eventually a wiry black bartender in a slinky black half tux took notice of Jane and moved over.

“Ah, you’re the woman Kat mentioned. Drinks on the house for a friend, eh?” The bartender winked and gestured behind her. “Name your poison.”

Jane sighed. “What do you have for drinking away a confusing sexual encounter with your best friend?”

To Jane’s horror, the bartender whirled around and rang a triangle. The entire club swiveled towards the bar in unison and cheered, some with raised glasses and others with an envious look in their eyes. Jane wished she could sink into the floor and do her best impression of a puddle of slime.

The bartender returns and bent over towards Jane. “Sorry. Bar tradition. We’ve got to ring the triangle whenever a girl finally gets her best friend into bed. And don’t worry, confusing is par for the course. You know she’ll come around like all the others did.”

Jane scowled. “What others? And I didn’t do the getting. She did.” She nearly leapt over the bar and grabbed the thin black woman by the wrist when she tried to pick up the metal bar again. Jane guessed there was another special chime for a first timer and she wanted none of it. “Ring that thing again and I’ll find some way to shove your head through it.”

A bit mortified at her outburst, Jane sat down as the bartender rubbed her wrist. “Look, I’m sorry. This has been a really odd weekend.”

“Normally I’d get the girls to hustle you out of here for sneezing on me but I think I’ll make an exception for a VIP. Just settle down.” The black woman’s face went from stony to softer when Jane nodded and then put her head on the bar with crossed arms.

“I have no idea what I’m doing,” she mumbled into her arms. “It was so spontaneous and so damn nice. One minute we’re eating pasta and the next we’re making out on the couch. And then three hours later she walks out after telling me it’s a mistake.”

A drink appeared next to her. It looked and smelled a lot like scotch. Jane lifted her head and groped the glass, then sipped it carefully. It burned with a lemon aftertaste followed by a burst of sweetness. The bartender gave a sympathetic grin. “It’s called the BFFT. Let’s just say I have made enough of these for it to be a house special.”


The bartender nodded. “I’ve seen a lot of girls come in here in just your state. Usually on the younger side of course, getting that first youthful experiment out of the way, but we always have some late bloomers.”
Jane drained the rest of the glass. “That’s just it. I don’t feel like I’m blooming late at all. I’ve literally never looked at another woman and have never felt the urge to have sex with one. But when she kissed me, it was all I wanted to do.”

The bartender shrugged. “Everyone gave Ellen’s ex, you know the one…” Jane shrugged back. Pop culture was a mystery and gay culture was not even on her radar. “Well, anyway. They broke up and the women went back to men. She said something about it being the exception rather than the rule. She loved the person, not the gender.” The darker woman appraised Jane, who pushed the empty glass forward.

“You love her, right?” Jane nodded. “And if she didn’t love you, you wouldn’t be here. You’d be sleeping it off with some guy.”

“But as friends,” Jane added quickly. “She was very clear about that. As family.”

The bartender chuckled. “It turns from one to the other fast. Like I said, I’ve seen a few of these come in here.”

“So what happened, um,” Jane glanced at the tuxedo top for a nametag and didn’t find one.

“Lisbeth,” said the bartender. She snapped her fingers a few times and a few more black-clad serving staff appeared. “I need to take a break,” she commanded them. “Keep the bar happy.” Lisbeth turned back to Jane. “Let’s go take five.” Jane slid off the barstool and followed the tall woman around the bar and back through the crowded kitchen, finally pushing into a quiet back room.

“You’re not going to kill me,” quipped Jane. She surveyed the room. It was an office stacked with papers and computer equipment, probably fifteen different things she could use to get away if push came to shove.

“Hardly. My boss would kill me if I got blood on her papers. But I figured I wanted to talk to you and not ruin our voices over the music.”

“Thanks,” said Jane. “But why the special treatment? I mean, you serve out however many house specials a week, right?”

Lisbeth smiled broadly. “Call it a bit of woman’s intuition. A hunch.” She sat down on a brown swivel chair and leaned back. “You have no one else you can talk to. Now, I’m not going to speak for those girls who find out they’re gay in the middle of Utah, but I’ve seen a lot of first timers. Most of these girls have female friends, or at least gay male friends. Most have someone they can talk to. But you? You have no one. You came to a bar you’ve never visited and poured your heart out to a bartender.”

“God, I’m like a bad country song, except with lesbians,” moaned Jane. She flopped into a threadbare easy chair and bumped her head on the filing cabinet.

“Eh, those songs exist for a reason. And it’s a nice break from the usual monotony of whining girls. You’re not like them, right? You’re too butch to admit your feelings but not so butch you pretend they aren’t there. You have a feminine side too. I like that. So talk.”

Jane felt her words spill out. “She kissed me after a date went bad. I kissed her. We went into the bedroom. We had sex for a few hours and then I got an explanation about how she thought we shouldn’t do it again and how it ranked in her top ten sexual experiences. God, she told me she keeps a journal. A goddamn journal of her sexual escapades. So not only am I being pushed away but I’m also being counted like weapons seized in a drug raid.”
The bartender nodded. “She’s usually standoffish, isn’t she? But around you she lets her guard down? And I am guessing there have been a few times when you’ve betrayed that.”

Jane nodded miserably, thinking of insults, misunderstandings, and of course, shooting Maura’s dad. “I haven’t been the best friend all the time.”

“Well, she doesn’t expect you to be,” reassured the bartender. “But this is her most intimate self, literally and figuratively, and she was worried you’d turn on her. A smooth dominant like yourself is usually the one to start these things. That she did it as who she is?” The bartender let out a slow whistle. “That took more strength than you can understand. Of course she shut herself off.”

Jane closed her eyes and banged her head a few times against the cabinet. “But I wanted her to stay. I begged her to stay. I tried to reassure her that nothing had changed and I still loved her.”

Lisbeth shook her head in disagreement. “First off, you both know something has changed, even if the underlying emotion hadn’t. But second, she is running scared because she thinks she’s lost everything by acting on impulse. That’s not her, right?”

Jane smiled through closed eyes. “Yeah. I’ve seen her plan her pajamas so they don’t clash with her sheets.” She laughed to herself. “I am betting she didn’t intend to do this tonight because my house is mostly orange tones and she was wearing neutrals.”

Lisbeth’s voice interrupted Jane’s thoughts. “She’s out of character, she has just opened herself sexually to her best friend, and she’s suddenly in doubt. She couldn’t stay. She had to prove to herself she was still herself. She had to regain all that control and distance. She’s…retreating. Let her.”

“But if she retreats too far, I’ll never get her back.”

She heard the chair creak up and the bartender’s heels click onto the floor. “What does getting her back mean to you?”

Jane opened her eyes and also stood up. “I…don’t know. I want to keep being her friend. As for the rest, I haven’t really thought about it.” She admitted internally what she wanted more than anything else was to hold Maura and to get reassurance they could still talk all the time. Maybe that’s what Maura wanted too?

“When you figure it out, you’ll keep her from retreating. You know how to chase and when to hang back. You’re a cop.”

The bartender creaked open the door and ushered Jane into the club. After another drink and a few rounds of seltzer to clear out the alcohol, Jane drove herself home. It was good to turn her brain off for a while. She passed out on her bed, still in her clothes.

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Chapter Summary

Maura and Jane must solve a chemistry-based case while hashing out the aftermath of their sexual encounter.

Highly smutty.

Dr. Isles surveyed the scene through a red-rimmed eye. The call had come in at 4AM, possible suicide off of the Prudential building, and woken her from her third night of fitful sleep in a row. She’d been applying face masks and creams all weekend to counteract the effects of her insomnia with only minimal results. Even her favorite blue and grey dress had failed to lift her mood this early in the day. Usually she could count on a comfortable set of heels and an artful makeup presentation to spur her to her usual mood but it just wasn’t clicking into place. She was still…concerned about what she had done with Jane on Friday and even more so by her continuing inability to accurately write up their sexual encounter.

She snapped her attention back to the body, who lay face down on a cracked bit of courtyard stone. Tall, little over 6 feet by her estimation, and on the heavyset side without muscle definition. Caucasian, with brown hair, a bit of gray in it. Although hair color was an imprecise marker of age, the combination of melanin loss and the body habitus suggested a grown male adult instead of a prematurely young teen.

The corpse was lying flat on the pavement, tiny bits of his body and brain splattered in a circle around where he landed. There was already a bevy of police officers and CSIU techs attempting to catalog every scrap of tissue and clothing before the rush of the day and scavengers made off with them. Korsak and Frost were there, milling about with a cup of coffee each. But not Jane yet. Maura did not usually fret about her friend when she was late to the scene, especially on a Monday morning. Jane was not a drunkard or a layabout, but she did occasionally decide Monday mornings were just something the boys had to handle. Maybe, though, Jane was ignoring her? Or avoiding her?

Maura shivered in spite of the warm weather. That had been her greatest fear upon initiating their sexual encounter. Perhaps Jane would find fault somehow and Maura would have both humiliated herself and lost her best friend. A complete rejection either of Maura’s entreaties or her physical appearance. However, Jane’s response had been the opposite. Open. Caring. Adoring, even. Wanting more, which Maura had not even slightly anticipated. But Maura had retreated. She couldn’t accept this was the final outcome. Emotional blowback from fraught sexual encounters could take days, perhaps weeks, to manifest and explode completely.

People were complicated. Well, at least the living people were complicated. Dead people were uncomplicated, or at least their complication stemmed not from feelings and inexplicable emotions but from physical conundrums. Hidden poisons, subtle diseases, bullet holes that could come from any number of weapons. These were all puzzles to solve and she had the tools to solve them. But attempting to discern what she should do in the face of her recent sexual escapade with her best friend was not something she could see under a magnetic scanner or a microscope. There were no texts that showed the map of the emotional heart. All she had were Netter’s maps of the coronary arteries and ventricles, wholly insufficient for the intangibles of the human mind.
She turned her thoughts again back to the body, attempting to ascertain how he had ended up in this position. The pattern of damage suggested impact, with broken glass to match that supposition. She tilted her head upwards to meet the gaze of two people over her, preparing to ask questions that she hated answering. Frost began, “So did he fall or was he pushed?”

“You know I hate guessing, Detective Frost.” She gave him a steely eyed look that she hoped was close enough to her normal stare that he would predictably back off. He did. It was reassuring to believe she could still control her emotions or give the appearance therein. “But if I had to guess, I wouldn’t. Because I don’t guess.” He gave a cocked eyebrow towards his bulky partner, but didn’t respond.

“Well, now that CSI you has enough pictures of him, maybe we can turn them over?” asked Korsak. He leaned his bulk towards her little bit and commented, “I think it was you who told me we can see a lot about how someone died from a fall by looking at their arms. Didn’t you say that most people who fall or were pushed extend their arms as if they want to break their fall?” His tone was inquisitive and highly pleasant.

“Yes, Detective Korsak. That’s absolutely right. In numerous studies in criminal journals I have learned that approximately 90% of people who were involuntarily removed from a height do have fractures in their carpels, ulna, and radius. So I believe it would be prudent for us to turn him over and see what I detect before we bring him back to the lab.”

It was nice to be listened to. It was nice to have a colleague who respected her. And Korsak had smiled at her through a thick but trimmed beard the whole time. He liked listening. More than Jane. She put aside another thought.

Very carefully, with gloves and effort, the detectives and uniforms nearby rolled the man over. It was not any sort of fracture that caught her eye and indicated the form of death this man had experienced. Yes, there was very obvious bruising around his face that suggested blood had pooled there before he had been removed from the building out of the window. However, there was a massive blood stain on his shirt indicating a perforation of the abdominal aorta or one of the iliac veins. It was too soon to tell. She took a glance at his extremities and noted that they were flaccid. The bones were shattered, of course, but they did not on first glance look like the result of extending his arms. They looked like pieces of plaster that had been tossed off of something and fragmented upon hitting a hard surface.

“Based on the current physical findings, I hypothesize this man was dead before he hit the ground.” She looked up and indicated a few open windows in the building above her. “Have your men search those rooms for signs of pooled blood, either cleaned or still present. I think this man sustained some other injury that resulted in a copious blood loss. Obviously I will need to have him brought back to the lab so I can do a thorough autopsy before making any final determination”

The trim black detective next to the plump older white man nudged Korsak in the side. “So unless this guy stabbed himself, almost bleed out, and threw himself out of the window, we’re looking at a murder.” He looked down at Dr. Isles. “Or would that be too much to guess?”

“You are correct, Detective Frost.” Her glare was as icy as his last name implied.

The ride back to the station was uneventful. The body had sat with her and she had made some chatter with the young morgue technician who was temping over summer vacation. He seemed pleasant enough. Happy to talk business with her, which she appreciated, though he had only rudimentary science skills and could not provide her with a sounding board for technique. He was content to lift bodies and move around, a job he said he was uniquely suited to because he had grown up on a farm and was used to slugging carcasses. Maura perhaps would have been interested
at another time but her thoughts kept drifting to Jane.

Jane hadn’t phoned in or otherwise let her know what was going on all weekend. No one seemed particularly concerned that Jane hadn’t attended the scene during the hours they had spent with the body on-site. If something had happened, Maura was completely in the dark. She hated that.

Maura reached the autopsy lab and began to take this man apart and piece them back together. She changed into her scrubs, donned her safety glasses, and had the CSI techs begin categorizing every piece of bone and flesh they had detected around him.

This face had been utterly crushed by the fall and she could not see anything about his eyes, the height of his cheekbones, the width of his nose. Everything had been flattened and splattered beyond all recognition. That any of his face was still intact though suggested his falling distance was not more than five or six stories. She hadn’t heard anything about the detective search so she didn’t have any confirmation. Nonetheless, the laws of physics as applied to the human body gave her supposition some weight. She moved his face from side to side. His neck was also fractured. She couldn’t tell yet whether that was another trauma inflicted perimortem or the consequence of being unceremoniously tossed off the building. She began to remove his clothing and noted every article as she took it off.

A pair of corduroy pants, worn about the ankles but otherwise clean. Checkered socks that were beige and matched the pants. No shoes though perhaps they had come loose in the fall. A white button-down shirt with a large blood stain. No undershirt. She exposed the abdomen and noted a large incision extending from the base of the xiphoid process to his pubis. It was a long neat cut, performed with a sharp non-serrated blade. She noted evidence of healing staple wounds on either side of the incision; this man had recently had surgery and the cut went through where that incision might have been. She could not tell whether one or multiple cuts had been made, only that at least one of them was deep enough to tear through some of his internal organs. Had he been held down when this occurred? She didn’t speculate. It was too soon for that.

The x-rays came back, and then the individually categorized pieces. She had Susie and another tech attempts to help her reassemble the face from everything they could find but she knew it would be a long and tedious task. She had not found any identification in his pocket and hoped that some other member of the police force was going to succeed where she had failed. Somewhere in the midst of assembling her flesh puzzle, one of the doors swung open and she heard the familiar tap of Jane’s feet on her linoleum floor.

Her heart began to race, to the point where she knew she’d be diagnosed with tachycardia had she been attached to an EKG. It took everything she had to keep from whirling around and talking to her friend. Then again, perhaps she should play it cool. Perhaps Jane was resentful or frustrated that their encounter had ended so abruptly and that Maura had kept her distance all weekend.

“Hey Maura. We found some things that might help your investigation.” Jane moved closer and Maura stiffened. Jane was right behind her, close enough that she could feel the warm breath against her ear. She a cold shiver went through her and she stifled a sudden intake of air. It was so strange to feel this near her friend where previously it would have just been some sort of sensation, like piece of fabric brushing her knee. Dr. Isles did not look up from her work.

“That is good to hear, Detective Rizzoli. As you can see this man has suffered significant trauma and his identification will be a challenge. I know that the incredibly talented staff around me will greatly assist me in discerning this man’s identity.”

“His name is Ralph Lauren,” replied Jane. Maura heard the sound of a piece of paper being waved back and forth.
Maura stood up and faced Jane. Jane also stiffened and was looking at her with eyes so troubled, so achingly needy, that it was physically painful. It was the same expression Maura had witnessed when Maura cut Jane out of her life after the shooting of Paddy Doyle or when some little tiff separated the two of them. Maura immediately regretted forcing formality on Jane to maintain distance. Truth to be told, she didn’t want distance. She wanted it to go back to normal.

“The designer?” She tossed a look back towards the brutalized cadaver. “This man is certainly not well dressed or distinguished enough to be…”

“We know. And we suspect it’s some sort of alias. The good news is a name like that attracts enough attention that somebody’s going to remember this guy,” said Jane, directing her gaze down at the report, shielding her emotions from her inquisitive friend. “Anyway, he was working at the Pru as maintenance, handyman type guy. Started about a month ago according to the entry logs. According to his job application, he is a Caucasian male with brown hair, 5’10” and 227 pounds.”

Maura looked back at him. “227 pounds? But he’s registering at,” she glanced back at the scale. “275 pounds.”

“Well, it’s possible the ID is incorrect.” Jane shrugged and looked frustrated. “I’ll see what I can get to make things easier. Thanks a lot Maura.”

“Thank you for coming down, Jane.” Maura let the sentence hang their. Susie and the other tech excused themselves as a machine started beeping in the other room. She didn’t recognize the sound and wondered if they had somehow snuck in a new piece of equipment. She made a mental note to discuss budgeting and departmental approval of purchases.

What she didn’t know was when Susie heard Jane called “Detective Rizzoli”, she made a subtle signal. Another tech would set a handful of timers that would go off in about two minutes. It was a good way to clear the room without being obvious.

“Yeah, well, I want to make your life easier. And better.”

“And you do, Jane. Professionally, I mean.” Maura looked into Jane’s eyes and felt that overwhelming urge to kiss her once again. She didn’t even know why anymore. It just was this deep need, like wanting to vomit.

“Well, that’s why we make such a great team, right? We complement each other professionally.” The cadence of the words was bitter and Jane continued looking hurt. Maura accepted this would not be the time to bring everything back to normal. Jane checked her watch and Maura suspected she fibbed when she said, “Well, I told Korsak I’d be upstairs in 10 minutes and it’s been 10.5 and you know how he is about timing. So I’ll see you later.”

She strode out of the room and Maura looked wistfully over her shoulder as she left. She looked back towards the man on her table and shook her head. Focus had been lost and she found herself not blaming Jane but instead blaming herself. The flesh puzzle would have to wait.

Maura stripped her gloves off and threw them in the trash can, washed up in the massive sink and retreated to her office. Looking around the tasteful furniture she decided against sitting down and ruining one of the priceless leather backed chairs. But she didn’t feel like changing out of her scrubs. They felt comfortable and familiar. They reminded her that she was a scientist and a doctor, not some passionate, half cocked creature who is likely to act on her emotions and set aside her scientific instincts. But then she looked at the tailored suits and high heels she diligently hung in the closet when she came to work. Those were her too, right? Those were the signs that she was a woman and a classy one at that. Constance had taught her the meaning of class, refinement, dignity.
Dignity. Maura had always had that, right? Integrity. Control. Finding out she was the daughter of a mobster had thrown some of that into chaos. She remembered the day Paddy Doyle had come to her and slit his hand open to prove that she was his blood. And she remembered her panic, and Jane’s comfort. Jane knew her. She knew the true Maura, the one who wasn’t just a set of comfortable scrubs that shielded her from the world. Jane knew the woman who was hanging in the closet, the woman who felt more at home in a boutique than in a mall. The woman who defied the stereotype of the frumpy pathologist and instead embodied the grace and style typically associated with so-called higher doctors. And now, Jane knew her body when it was undressed.

Maura gave in and stripped off her scrubs, carefully placing them in a bag she kept in her office for just that purpose. She slipped into the private showers she’d had installed a few years ago and scrubbed herself to remove the scent of deco. She chose a sandalwood soap with tiny fragments of coconut bark to act as an exfoliant, with lemon extract to pull the formaldehyde scent out of her pores. There was nothing sexy about the smell of formaldehyde and she realized she wanted to feel sexy.

Jane had succeeded so well in making her feel like that. When Jane walked her into the bedroom, Maura expected to be thrown on the bed and have her clothing ripped off. When they had gone undercover at the lesbian bar, Jane had discussed how she would be the man because she was bossy. And that had led to a discussion about Maura’s bossiness implying she could also be the man. As it worked out, Jane always looked that little bit more masculine, though the hint of womanly curves through a fitted t-shirt tempered that masculinity.

What had that bartender said, or at least what had Jane recounted to her? “The boys must eat you up. You’re just like them. Dominant energy.”

All of those conversations had echoed in Maura’s head when she crossed into her friend’s familiar bedroom. Instead of ravaging, Jane had gently pressed Maura back onto the bed and kissed her. The dark-haired woman then spent some time patiently exploring Maura’s neck with her fingertips, eventually unbuttoning Maura’s blouse just one button to access the tops of her breasts. Maura found herself less and less able to keep Jane from continuing that pattern of exploration. She almost ripped off her shirt herself when Jane finally said with a warm smile, “Would you like me to take your shirt off?

“Yes,” Maura had said, more quickly than she’d ever consented to her clothing being removed her entire sexual life. The shirt had been taken off her one button at a time. Jane’s mouth had trailed down the gap between her breasts and over the lace edge of her bra. It had been specially selected for seduction of Bill, no, he didn’t deserve the term. William. And perhaps Jane would appreciate it less than he but it didn’t matter. It made her feel sexy and beautiful.

Jane made her way down Maura’s small stomach and stopped at her navel, then crawled her way back up to lean on Maura’s body and press her against bed for another kiss. There was so much unexpected tenderness, so much adoration and lavishness that Maura couldn’t help but reciprocate. In fact Jane seem somewhat surprised when Maura’s hands came up to trace the nape of her neck and run down her broad shoulders while they were kissing. Jane had smiled at her and tried to push her hands down again but Maura would have nothing of it. It didn’t make sense for her to be selfish when Jane was responding in exactly the way Maura had always hoped.

Maura had eventually lost out to Jane’s insistence on touching her. Maura let Jane stretch her arms out above her head, pinning her wrists in place with a careful hand, and tease her nipples through the thin fabric of her bra. Maura once again praised herself for wearing something lacy and nearly shear. As Jane’s teeth raked over her breast, little vibrations went through her areola and spread across her chest. The sensations rippled across the body until they pooled in the warmth between her legs. She
didn’t suppress the moan that escaped her lips and then wondered to herself why she thought that was even a good idea. Why would she want to not demonstrate that she was enjoying herself? Wouldn’t she as a partner want to know that her partner was enjoying herself? Or himself? Another lightning flash of pleasure as Jane gently rubbed her breasts and traced along the tops of the cups.

“You know,” said Jane with a smile, “I have seen you in your underwear before. I just never expected to enjoy you so much while in it…” She reached a hand under Maura, keeping her other hand across Maura’s wrists, and unhooked the bra more dexterously then Maura had anticipated. Her bra came loose and snapped across her chest.

“Or out of it.” Jane finished. She swiftly rearranged their bodies to remove the bra, tossed the garment to the floor and silenced Maura’s protest about the expense of the garment with another deep kiss. Maura found herself being carefully explored with mouth and fingertips once again. She still wasn’t quite sure what she was doing here and why she wasn’t stopping. Neither one of them was gay. She remembered the teasing conversation they had when Jane was planning on going to the gay bar and how Maura had said Jane wasn’t her type. And yet here Jane was, making it very obvious that Maura was her type. Suddenly Maura felt ashamed. She put a hand out to stop Jane and the dark-haired woman paused, concerned.

“Maura. Did I do something wrong? Did I hurt you?” Maura looked at Jane and shook her head. “No. What you are doing is amazingly pleasurable. But I wanted to make sure that in spite of our conversation several years ago, I would say that you are exactly my type. You are compassionate, attentive, and very beautiful. I am incredibly happy that my first lesbian experience will be with you.” Jane gently flopped next to Maura and pulled her close, stopping the long slow passion and turning to one of more comfort.

“Maura,” Jane said, “I don’t take most of these types of conversation seriously. I know when we tease each other we do it from a place of love. You know that whenever I call you weird I appreciate you. I know whenever you call me aggressive, it’s because you appreciate how forward I am and how much I care about doing my job.” She kissed Maura’s eyelids and then the middle of her forehead. “I know if you didn’t want me to be here, you would have me walk away. And I know you have exceptional taste in all things.”

Maura smiled at the cocked eyebrow and said, “Well, I do have an extensive collection of incredibly rare masks from Ethiopia. I have a shoe collection that features limited-edition pumps. At least one of my rings has been classified as the largest professionally cut ruby in Massachusetts.” She ran her hand across the side of Jane’s face. “And I am happy to leave them all behind because I am also with the most amazing woman in all of Massachusetts. The bravest detective, the most talented police officer, my best friend, my confidante. Right now, I want you more than any possession or place in this world.”

Jane smiled. “Then please let me have you.”

Maura nodded, though she worried the interruption had change the mood or that Jane would perhaps reconsider. But when Jane dipped her head lower and wrapped her mouth around Maura’s nipple, she knew that the mood was very easily reestablished. She felt the warm tongue exploring the ridges of her breast and attending to her skin in a way that literally no man had ever done. Certainly they enjoyed her breasts and many of her male lovers would spend many happy minutes sucking on them. This was the first time she was being adored simply because her pleasure was needed.

She always felt the men, even Ian, loved touching her because she gave them a thrill. For once, she was being touched because she was the thrill. The two women had spent many wonderful minutes with Jane alternating between Maura’s right and left breasts, sometimes sucking, sometimes gently
kissing, sometimes using her tongue to swirl around the edges and then up to the tip. Maura realized that her level of arousal was becoming almost unbearable and she worried she was so soaked that she might ruin the skirt she was wearing.

So once again she was forced to halt the delicious pleasure, looking Jane in the eye, and said, “We need to stop.”

At that, Jane almost leapt off the bed and paced away, almost against the wall, wearing an expression of confused disquiet.

Maura replied, “No, no no. Please come back. I mean, I… I need to take my skirt off. It’s dry clean only. And I don’t think I’m going to have time to go to the dry cleaner anytime in the next few days. And I very much would like to continue what we are doing but I don’t want to worry about my clothing,” she said, rambling and almost in a panic. She was about to drive Jane away, which was the absolute worst thing in the world right now. “Please let me undress for you.”

Jane rubbed her forehead and said, “Maura. It’s a good thing that I know you so well. Because from anyone else, that would be an excuse to stop, not an urging to keep going.”

Maura did not have to undress herself. Jane slowly slipped the skirt and her underwear off of Maura, and with a bit of an eye roll, neatly tossed the underwear in one corner and the skirt of the other. “See? No liquid transfer.”

Maura felt completely exposed and at a sudden power loss. Here she was, completely naked, and Jane was completely clothed. So Maura made a passable excuse wasn’t far from the truth. “You know, I don’t know how many pairs of black pants you have. It would be a shame if you were to…”

“Why Dr. Isles,” said Jane with a broad grin, standing at the foot of the bed with her hands on her hips. “Would you like me to undress for you?”

Maura realized that in spite of seeing Jane in various states of undress, caused by everything from injuries to disease scares, she wanted to see Jane undressed for completely different reasons. Like she was looking at Jane through a new piece of equipment “I would like that very much,” she said formally.

Jane never let the smile off her face and stripped her T-shirt off in a fluid motion, tossing it to the floor. She unbuttoned her pants, and slid them off, pausing briefly to remove her socks. But she didn’t remove her bra and panties. Maura didn’t insist. She understood the allure of a little bit of accent early in the sexual encounter…

Maura’s hands roamed over her own body while she was in the shower and she noticed she was becoming aroused at the memory of their encounter. She debated pleasuring herself right there but it was both disrespectful to the cadavers next door and a great interruption of her workday. No. She might have time to indulge later. But for now, the murder would need to take precedence. Nonetheless there was nothing forcing her to go back into the lab. She figured perhaps she went upstairs and have a little food, maybe clear her mind by…well, by doing something not in the shower.

She found her way into the café where Angela was busily pouring coffee and administering various foods to all who came through her restaurant. The older woman’s eyes lit up as Maura came in and waited in line patiently behind two policemen, with whom she made awkward conversation. She shifted back and forth in her heels and looked around. She didn’t know exactly what she was looking for but she knew it wasn’t there in those two men. She fidgeted with the corner of her suit. She wished she had worn underwear that was more flattering, then dismissed the thought. There was
no point wearing a thong under scrubs. It was likely they would be dreadfully uncomfortable.

“Maura,” said Angela. “I was wondering what I see you today. It seems we missed each other this morning.” The older Italian woman rapidly prepared Maura’s usual tea, adding in a tiny swirl of honey and capping it with a mint leaf that she had apparently been saving just for Maura. The blonde managed a wan smile. While she enjoyed Angela’s company, this was not the Rizzoli she was hoping to see. Jane was nowhere to be found.

Maura considered going upstairs and instead sat herself down the café. She was always willing to be upfront and confrontational, at least where Jane was concerned, but her normal comfort was replaced with cautious reticence. The contrast between the openness of Jane’s desire and Maura’s cold rejection made Jane’s absence easily explainable. If the relationship hadn’t been damaged by the sexual act, the friendship was certainly in danger because of Maura’s fear and, in spite of her brilliance, Maura didn’t know what to do or how to fix it.

After a few minutes of idle conversation with Angela, she excused herself back downstairs. Even if Jane wasn’t there, she had to continue her work. Once again in her scrubs, Maura dove into the cadaver and tried to forget everything.

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Jane Rizzoli stood in front of her desk, hands on her hips, and scowled at the two detectives in front of her. Both seemed far too amused for her taste, a feeling amplified by her frustration at Maura and her lack of coffee. Dodging her best friend meant forgoing her hourly journeys to her mother’s café, leaving Jane two cups short of her normal intake and her temper three steps closer to exploding than normal.

“Seriously guys? Ralph Lauren? You expect me to go downstairs and tell Maura, a woman who can detect a limited-edition high heel from 100 yards, that the guy she has on her table is Ralph Lauren?”

The smirking Detective Frost turned to the similarly grinning Detective Korsak. “What can I say,” he began. “It’s nice to know we haven’t celebrity downstairs instead of the usual gang of idiots.”

“Yeah,” continued Korsak, taking up the mirth of his partner. “I mean, Boston is becoming quite the center of international fashion. And here we have a designer that literally landed on our door.” His terrible pun sent both of them chortling.

“You two…chuckleheads…know as well as I do that the guy downstairs is as much Ralph Lauren as one of you is Curt Schilling. Or three Curt Schillings,” she said, gesturing to Korsak’s paunch. He pretended to look wounded as he wrapped his arm around his stomach. “Fine. I’ll go and tell her this and hope that she doesn’t think we’re making fun of her.” She stomped out of the office, fumed in front of the perennially slow elevators, and made her journey to the basement.

When she came upstairs, the anger in her mood had dissipated and was replaced by a dull resignation. She preferred the aggravation administered by her ridiculous partners to the horrible emptiness that Maura now conjured. It had been so bad she had stopped the elevator between floors to compose herself. She thought tears would come out. Instead it was like someone had punched her right in the ribs, taking her breath away and leaving her gasping for relief.

It was worse than when she had shot Maura’s father, she realized. At least then, Maura had been angry because Jane had hurt her, requiring Jane to find a way to make amends. Jane had gotten used to doing that early in life. You don’t grow up awkward and tomboyish without being forced to apologize on regular basis for breaking a window or cursing out a nun. This time, Jane had not done anything wrong. Neither one of them had done something wrong. There weren’t apologies or
amends to be made. It was an emotional impasse.

Jane tried to remind herself of Lisbeth’s admonishments. Maura was being self-protective and Jane would just have to be patient. The patience was terrible though. It was like waiting for someone to come out of surgery or waiting for the call on a flag after an instant replay.

Jane took a breath and tried to storm back into her office, pretending to be annoyed at their continuing joke. The smiles on the two men vanished as soon as they saw her and she knew her deception was insufficient. She dropped the pretense, flopped into her office chair, and spun around once, rubbing her eyes with her fingers. God, it felt like 2 o’clock in the morning after a 36 hour shift even though it was three hours into a work day after two days of sleeping and self-pity.

“Everything all right with Doctor Isles,” said Korsak cautiously.

“Yeah, yeah. Everything’s fine.” It was a lie. Everyone in earshot knew it was a lie. This wasn’t the time to admit it. “She says the dead body downstairs is too fat to be our guy. He’s got 50 pounds on our suspect, at least according to the morgue scale. Once she’s done, she’ll have more info.”

Frost shrugged his well-tailored shoulders. “Well, if he’s like anyone else I know, he doesn’t go to the DMV every time he ends up on a four-month drinking and doughnut binge.” He poked at Korsak’s gut and the older man playfully, or at least attempted playfully, swatted it away. “We’ll find out a bit more once the uniforms get back from his apartment.”

“Okay, yeah.” She had no interest in figuring out with this flat fat guy was doing in Boston or why someone felt the need to beat the hell out of him before throwing him out of the window of Boston’s second-largest skyscraper. She could predict from here that he would be a quiet guy who mostly kept to himself, no friends or family in the immediate area, and nothing to suggest any involvement in criminal activities. He’d have a mostly empty bank account, maybe in estranged wife or daughter, and would otherwise have lived a dull and unremarkable life until he dropped dead from a heart attack brought on by too many Big Macs.

She turned around in her chair and listened to the boys discuss the better doughnut joints in a 10 mile radius. She couldn’t believe the two of them could hold conversation about this for more than 30 seconds, but here they were on minute five. She half tuned into it and half mulled the case over in her head.

Jane sat up suddenly and stopped swirling herself in her chair.

“Wait, hold on,” she said. “That ID is under a month old. How the hell do you gain 50 pounds in three weeks without being a champion hotdog eater or a sumo wrestler?”

Korsak looked thoughtful as well. “Yeah, every time I gained weight it’s taken a while to put it on and infinitely longer to take it off,” he gave a glare at Frost, who apparently restrained himself over a dieting comment.

Frost picked up the thread. “He looks like his picture, though,” he said, tapping on his computer and swirling the monitor around to face Jane. “Right now it looks like someone steamrolled his face, but that’s definitely the same guy and he doesn’t look much fatter than he did a few weeks ago.”

“That’s because the weight was not in his face, Detective Frost.” Maura’s scientific tone filled the air and Jane willed herself not to look back, then thought the better and turned around. Anything to keep the boys from inquiring further about the nature of Maura and Jane’s relationship.

Maura, her posture rigid and her face carefully surveying the three detectives, continued to relay her
autopsy finding. “In the last two weeks, someone placed 50 pounds of osmium metal in his abdomen.”

The detectives exchanged confused looks. Korsark spoke first. “I’ve heard of drug smugglers filling their colons with cocaine and pooping them out once they get over the Mexican border.” He made a gesture with his body that left Frost giggling like a teenage boy and Jane covering her eyes in half-horror, half-irritation.

“But 50 pounds of metal,” the older detective continued. “I saw that guy on the sidewalk. Wouldn’t his intestines have looked chrome plated?”

“That’s not quite correct,” stated Maura, her eyes fixed on Korsak and no longer drifting towards Jane’s face. “Chromium, the element used to make chrome plating, tends to be grayish white in its unprocessed state. Osmium, on the other hand, is silvery, though,” she hastened to add, “not actually made of silver. Furthermore, osmium is significantly more dense than chromium.”

“Right, right, which means you don’t need as much metal to make that kind of weight. We all took high school chemistry. What’s the bottom line?”

Under normal circumstances, Jane’s snappy retort would have come naturally. After all, this interplay was expected. Maura would go off on a tangent, Jane would make a slightly biting quip, and Maura would return to the topic. The problem was this time, the anger and aggravation was totally faked. Sharing information like this was what made Maura special. Jane wanted to be near Maura again to appreciate that specialness. She would have let Maura recite the periodic table to her as long as it meant Jane could hold her one more time, just being together.

Maura played her part and resumed her explanation. No trace of hurt entered her voice as she steadily conveyed her autopsy results. “Unlike a so-called drug mule, Ralph Lauren did not swallow the metal. Instead, it was surgically inserted into his body cavity. The metal was concealed within cavities that would not have access to the contents of his gastrointestinal system.”

Jane turned to Frost, who was beginning to bend over in discomfort. The young man had improved his squeamishness significantly over the past few years, but somebody playing hide and seek with human organs was way beyond this tolerance. He waved a hand at the women as he shuffled towards another room. “I’ll go see what’s going on with the, um, apartment search. You all have fun covering some guy’s liver with disco balls.”

“Actually, insertion of metal into or onto the liver would have caused an unacceptable decrease in function, leading to death,” Maura called after the retreating detective. Any other person would have meant that as a way to make fun of him but Maura was too goodhearted. This was her conveying facts because she loved to give information. She loved her job. She loved Jane. And Jane wondered if that last one would be true much longer.

Thank goodness Korsak brought the conversation back together. “So a middle-aged handyman gets opened up, filled with metal, beat up, and then thrown out a window.” He and Jane shared a confused look. “I have to say this is one of the weirdest cases I’ve ever encountered.”

“But the motive is similar, right,” said Jane, waving one hand back and forth. “Osmium is super rare. 50 pounds of osmium costs the same as 50 pounds of cocaine and is a hell of a lot smaller. So this is some sort of high-stakes drug mule?”

“Given the rarity of osmium, every pound of osmium is likely worth hundred pounds of street grade cocaine. And technically it would be a heavy metal mule, but I think that term is too pop culture for a crime of this nature.” Maura bantered back. Jane’s breath caught in the back of her throat and she
locked eyes with Maura. The doctor’s smile was genuine but delicate, almost not daring to cross her face. Jane tiptoed around the interaction.

“No, I like it. Heavy metal mule,” replied Jane. She played a few bars of air guitar, followed by an air power cord. She suppressed the urge to make a “bwannnggg” sound to accompany it, fearing that much silliness might disrupt the fragile conversation. “Okay, so, you said it was inserted shortly before his death?”

Maura nodded her head, a cascade of red brown curls bouncing gently. “There was a certain amount of wound healing around the spheres. Based on the amount of inflammation and scar tissue, I’d say it was about two weeks ago.”

“All right. We have a timeframe. Let’s start looking into things that happen in this guy’s life in the past 14 days.” Jane turned her head and then half-yelled into the other room, “Yo Frost. I have something for you to deal with that isn’t decorating somebody’s intestines like a Christmas tree.”

“Wait, Jane.” The other woman looked suddenly pained and concerned. “I had not considered that he might be immunosuppressed or otherwise ill. That could impede his healing. I will need to recheck all of my results.”

Jane wanted to reach her hand out to stop her friend and reassure her just like every other time Maura’s self-doubt reared its scowling head. But Jane couldn’t allow herself to be physical again, even in this limited fashion, until Maura let her. Thank God for Korsak, Jane noted to herself as she had so many times in the past.

The heavyset older man placed one broad hand on Maura’s slim shoulder. “I’m certain this guy was as healthy as an overweight middle-aged guy could be. And I’ll bet you a dozen doughnuts at Ruby’s Donut Shack that you don’t find anything more interesting than high cholesterol when you examine the results.”

Maura’s face pulled into a line of consternation. She flickered her eyes up at Jane and Jane smiled cautiously. Maura returned a bare mirror of the grin and Jane felt the five dimensional Gordian knot in her stomach untie just a fraction.

“Detective Korsak,” chided the doctor. “It is highly inappropriate to wage bets over the results of an autopsy. And furthermore, doughnuts are filled with saturated fats and refined sugars. Neither of these are healthy for anyone of any age.”

“Yeah, Korsak,” Frost replied. The young man had strolled in, all signs of nausea or discomfort erased from his dark, chiseled face. “You need to watch your saturated fats. Plus, we all know Ruby’s is not the place to go for good doughnuts. The bet would mean more if you were getting a dozen from Thea’s House of Sweets.”

Jane rolled her eyes. “Oh will you to knock it off with the doughnut discussion. You’re making me hungry. Plus Ma would be horribly offended if she knew you two were cheating on her pastries.” She turned back to Maura. “Thank you for the report. Let us know if you find anything else.”

“Of course, Jane. I’m happy to help.” The tone had become so professional and so cold. The knot in Jane’s gut retightened and added another layer.

Maura turned on a single stiletto and clicked her way out of the office to the elevator. Korsak walked closer to Jane and nudged her with her shoulder. “Go talk to her,” he said in her ear, quiet enough that no one but Frost could detect. “Seems like something is on her mind, yeah?”
Jane shook her head. “No, it’s fine. We need to work…”

“Nope, no work. Korsak and I are going for donuts. See you in 15.” Frost grabbed his jacket and keys, and half dragged Korsak towards the exit. “But were going to take the stairs so it balances out.”

“That’s not how it works and you know it,” called Jane, her voice rising as the two men waltzed out. Then she sighed. She sat down at her desk and put her head in her hands. A few moments of contemplation later, she clasped her fingers behind her curly mane and let her forehead drop to the top of the worn and paper-covered desk. The other detective was right. She should go back to autopsy and pull the lovely doctor aside for something that resembled closure. She stepped into the elevator, hit the buttons for the basement, then pulled the emergency stop halfway between the floors.

Jane remembered how Maura had felt next to her, sated from Jane’s touch and Jane’s desire. The detective, happily curled around the smaller woman, idly ran her hands through Maura’s hair and wondered if she had managed to send her lover into a bliss-induced sleep. However, the slim, naked woman draped over her chest, her eyes half lidded with pleasure, had suddenly rolled over to stare intensely down at her best friend. With all the seriousness of any other definitive statement from Dr. Isles, Maura informed Jane, “I want to touch you.”

The statement might have been erotic under other circumstances, but it was delivered as a professional demand. Maura could have subsequently stated that she needed test results taken from the lab or assistance moving a body without needing to shift her tone. It was all Jane could do to keep from laughing and ruining the mood. Maura did not make soft requests, most likely because she knew they would be denied unless she made it clear they could not be ignored.

Jane smiled at her friend and reached one finger to caress the long strands of hair that fell away from Maura’s face and draped in front of her. She tucked the hair neatly behind Maura’s ear pulled the smaller woman closer. “Mmm, do you, now?” The kiss she initiated was quickly broken and Maura resumed her position arcing over Jane’s torso.

“You must tell me whether you want me to do this or not,” said Maura. The tone was still deeply serious but some uncertainty slipped. “I will not be offended if you choose to decline.”

Jane’s face shifted to one of concern and she pressed Maura’s shoulders to bring her back down to the bed. She laced her body around Maura’s form, intertwining their legs to bring their faces together so they were almost touching.

“Why would I decline? I would love for you to touch me. I want to be intimate with you in all ways, giving and receiving.”

Maura glanced over to the side, breaking a steady gaze. Jane attempted to correctly discern the mood in front of her, but found herself struggling. She gave up guessing.

“Maura. Please tell me what you’re thinking. I don’t want you to believe for a second that I want anything other than you right now.” Maura turned her head back towards Jane, who immediately and easily translated this particular facial expression. Jane was about to receive a pearl of scientific wisdom, masquerading as an actual answer.

“In many traditional butch/femme relationships, the masculine figure prefers to perform sexual actions and not to receive. In some cases, the so-called ‘stone butches’ may not engage in physical interactions at all.” So prim, so matter-of-fact.
Jane’s otherwise intense arousal was tempered by a burst of consternation. “You think I’m the man? What, because I wear pants and a gun every day?” Her body tensed up she had to keep herself from her usual frustrated scowl whenever the two entered this sort of test. “Didn’t we already have this conversation a few hours ago?”

Maura didn’t respond. The lines around her eyes creased and her face became an upsetting mix of shame and fear that had been beaten, quite literally, into Maura after years of rejection.

“Or,” said Jane more softly, brushing her fingertips down Maura’s neck and over rounded curve of her shoulder, “You are giving yourself an excuse in case I did reject you because you can’t believe I would want that from you.”

There was an imperceptible, slightly miserable nod in reply. Rather than reply, Jane took in a breath and captured Maura’s hand. She drew it slowly down her own body, letting Maura’s palm trail over the lines of her rib cage, the rise of her hips, and finally between her legs. She parted her folds and let Maura’s hand slip in between. A rush of pleasure filled her as Maura’s fingers brushed over the inner lips, the sensation mirrored in Maura’s face as she felt Jane’s wetness.

“I want you. Never doubt that,” said Jane in breathy gasp.

“Thank you,” whispered Maura, closing her eyes and leaning her head on Jane’s shoulder, keeping her hand in place. She crawled on top of Jane and pushed the taller woman’s legs apart with her knees. Then, she eased her hand down between their bodies, spread Jane’s folds, and began tracing the contours of her sex with inquisitive, gentle fingers.

Jane closed her eyes and relaxed into the pillow, allowing sensations to flow over her in warm tide. Maura seemed in no hurry. In the back of Jane’s mind, she recognized the methodical exploration of a scientist and anatomist in the touches being administered to her. The attentive, careful investigation that Maura applied at work was now being used to work Jane into sensual heights she had not experienced in so long. The analog between Maura’s lovemaking and Maura’s work with the dead would have been disturbing had it not been washed away by deep and constant pleasure.

A wonderful moan escaped her lips as Maura began stroking her clit with two graceful fingers. Deep and slow, covering every inch of her sex, leisurely and lightly, then quickly and hard. Jane let her eyes open and focused up on Maura. The other woman was looking down with an expression of what Jane could only call concentrated awe. The small doctor looked so intent and so happy. When she brought her fingers up to circle Jane’s clit again and Jane let out a sigh of contentment, Maura reacted as well, as if she were unaccustomed to being the giver in this way. Her blue-green eyes widened and a small smile flickered into place. Jane wrapped her arms around Maura and kissed her, causing the fingers between Jane’s legs to quicken. Her orgasm hit with raging force and she unconsciously dug her nails into Maura’s back as she spasmed and writhed. As the sensations subsided, Maura slowed her hand and curled herself into Jane’s shoulder.

“You are so beautiful. You are unlike anyone I have ever been with,” said Maura. Jane sighed and nuzzled her friend with her forehead.

“And you are…incredible. Amazing. And very talented for your first time, Dr. Isles,” Jane added with a tiny smirk.

Jane could feel Maura blinking against her skin. “The female genital anatomy is much more subtle than that of the male. There are analogous anatomical structures, namely in the glans clitoris versus the glans penis, but the configuration makes sexual stimulation slightly different. For example, stimulating the clitoral root is more difficult than accessing the penile root. However, your vulva…”
“Can you not discuss my anatomy when we’re basking in an afterglow, Maura,” said Jane, groaning slightly. This was still Maura, and the commentary was not malicious, but it was deeply unsexy.

Maura propped herself up on an elbow and regarded Jane with a mischievous eye. “So I should do it while I’m making love to you?” She began stroking Jane again and, just before Jane slipped back into a haze of pleasure, she responded with a firm, “No.”

Jane realized she had been standing in a closed elevator at the ground floor for a good three minutes. She shook her head, trying to clear it of these smutty thoughts, and went out into autopsy.
Donuts and Dalliances

Maura Isles did not like to guess. Casually twisting facts and overinterpreting limited information to fit a biased conclusion made her want to vomit. However, like legions of scientists before her, Dr. Isles was not above suggesting hypotheticals to focus her investigations. No scientist would look at every possible avenue due to sheer inefficiency. Instead, they would allow the evidence and laws of statistics to direct their attention towards the most fruitful outcomes.

If Jane were here, and Maura desperately wished she were, Jane would say this was just a fancy way of guessing. Maura could almost hear that tone in Jane’s voice. That wonderful combination of annoyed and playful that made Maura so attracted to her. The way Jane both respected and teased Maura so that she was neither on a pedestal nor in the gutter. She sighed.

Maura rifled papers on her desk, trying to align them in a way that might induce further insight. Truth to be told, she had not discovered or hypothesized anything more than what she had completed with the detectives. Small spheres of osmium were surgically inserted into this man’s body. They had been deliberately placed within tissues and spaces that would bear a foreign object without too much loss of function, at least in the short term. Most were in the base of the man’s body, seeing as the density of the metal would tear through even strong tissue. The balls were in pouches of biologically inert mesh, anchored in place with what should have been dissolvable staples. In this case, she noted in her report, the staples were permanent. Obviously, someone planned to take the metal out again and decided the expense of dissolvable staples was not worth it.

The neatness of the pouch placement suggested the man had been anesthetized rather than operated on while conscious and objecting, which in turn suggested the surgery was performed in the presence of trained professionals. She would indicate this in her report. The detectives would need to see whether he had been admitted to a hospital for an outpatient procedure; perhaps this had masqueraded as a hernia repair. She shook her head. That would imply a room full of medical professionals all willing to insert foreign bodies not designed for healing into the man’s torso. The breach of scientific etiquette was deeply disturbing. This was certainly not how members of her profession were supposed to behave.

She drew the man’s torso on a piece of paper and placed a few lines on it. His abdomen showed evidence of a large, healing incision that someone had opened deliberately. Perhaps, she noted on one side of the paper, someone had attempted to extract the spheres and had failed to do so. But why? She left the questions to the detectives. Motive was not Maura’s specialty. Explanation and scientific curiosity were.

A quiet series of knocks made her raise her head. Jane stood there, anxiously leaning on the door frame, looking nervous and wary as Jane had often been when faced with Maura’s wrath. Today, they both knew, was different. There is no fight, misunderstanding, or spat. There had instead been beautiful passion. Yet here they were, acting as if there had been some sort of transgression.

“Maura, do you have a little time? I know you must be very busy with Mr. Metal in there.”

Maura clicked her pen down and folded her hands neatly on the table. “Of course, Jane. I was just putting the finishing touches on my report.”

Jane walked in, quietly closing the door behind her, and striding with those beautiful, long legs to the front of Maura’s desk. She paced for a moment, then sat down. She put her hands on the table, gripping it as if she expected the table to drift away in some violation of gravity.
“I’m actually here because of us. Because things are so tense.” Jane looked at Maura. “I hate it when we fight but I think we need to actually, you know, talk.”

Maura let out a deep sigh of relief. “I would like that very much,” she admitted. The distance she had imposed had successfully protected the doctor from the emotional conflict of their new relationship. It had simultaneously cut Jane away from her, a situation more agonizing than confronting their sexual encounter. That Jane was here suggested Maura’s excision had failed, and never had Maura been happier not to succeed.

“Me too. As you would’ve guessed, since I’m here,” Jane added quickly. “But we should not talk right now. Not when we have so many things to finish before the end of the day. Maybe tonight? Over dinner? I mean, if we’re not up too late figuring out what the hell this guy was doing with a belly full of metal.”

Maura’s smile flickered across her face. “Well, as you like to say, he’s not going to get much deader. Let me finalize the documentation and bring it to you. Then, maybe we can get something to eat.”

Jane smile was just as relieved as Maura’s. “Great. Now,” she said, her tone businesslike, but not distant. The comfortable tone of Jane doing her job. “What do we have? Cause of death?”

Maura turn the papers to face Jane. “Mr. Lauren died due to rapid exsanguination from an incision in his abdomen.”

Jane stood up, locked her hands in front of her and leaned on the back of the chair. She rubbed her forehead in confusion. “The beating and the swan dive weren’t the cause. You’re sure about the beating? He looked pretty screwed up when I saw him on the table.”

“He was the victim of severe battery, but it was performed at least five days before, as indicated by the formation of bruises. The injuries were likely painful but not life-threatening. Most of the bone breaks were the result of his falling from a great height, likely through a window based on the glass near the body.”

“Okay. So where did he bleed from?”

“His former incision. The scar was opened with a fine pointed blade…”

“A scalpel,” said Jane.

Maura gave her a scientific glare. “That is one of many sharp objects that can be used to open a healing wound, Jane.” Jane’s reply was a familiar expression of what Maura recognized now as loving exasperation. “If this were a surgical excision, a scalpel would be the most likely tool. However, the wielder misjudged.”

“Misjudged,” Jane said urgently. “The guy cutting open Mr. Lauren was trying to dig out the metal and, what, screwed up?”

“The rationale for opening Mr. Lauren’s abdomen is not something I can discern through this autopsy, Jane, and you know I do not guess.” Another eye roll, which Maura appreciated, then ignored. “Regardless of intent, I found evidence the blade passed through multiple arteries in his lower abdomen. He would’ve bled out within minutes.”

“I’m guessing this is not the kind of error a good doctor makes.”

Maura’s shook her head. “Even the most basic anatomy student would recognize the delicacy of interacting with the torso. Blood supply to the…”
“I get it. This guy might’ve flunked outta med school?” She held up her hands in a stopping position before Maura could reply. “I won’t ask you to guess. Just a suggestion for your later discernment. Anything else?"

Maura indicated another line in her report. “The metal was surgically inserted in a way suggesting a sterile environment involving skilled personnel and anesthesia.”

“Nobody went after him with a steak knife and a bottle of cheap whiskey in a basement. That’s good to know,” Jane said, drumming her fingers. “Okay. This means we must figure out whether this guy was in the hospital, in a private clinic, or something else. Maybe he flew down to Mexico for this kind of thing.” She nodded her head a few times. “This is really helpful, Maura. Thank you.”

Jane turned on her heel and went to leave the room. She placed her hand on the doorknob and turned back. “I’m looking forward to tonight. Let’s figure out who put the balls in this guy,” she said, breaking the bit of solemnity she had used in the first sentence with a mark of crass humor. Before Maura could give a response, Jane swung out the door.

Maura rose and crossed the floor, closing the door behind her best friend and leaning her forehead against the interior surface. So many things she loved about Jane were on brilliant display when the woman came to visit. Her tenderness, her devotion, her beauty, her intellect, her insight. All these things had made Maura love Jane as a friend. Maura had told Jane as much in the past. Jane had reciprocated. It had all been fine.

Over time, Maura began to consider Jane not only her best friend but also an object of desire. Maura knew such attractions were often present between heterosexual females. Had her life been a shojo manga from 1930, her feelings for Jane might be termed a Class S relationship. In Western parlance, she had a “girl crush” on a woman whom she admired. It was reasonable Maura might become more intensely interested in her friend, seeing as the two of them shared so many emotional and occasionally physical moments.

Having cataloged the relationship as such, Maura put her feelings aside. After all, Maura had multiple romantic prospects in the form of various attractive men, not all of whom were serial killers. She never lacked for sexual company and could find herself quite busy with any number of lovers. But inevitably the relationships would be short term. All the men would have some subtle or not too subtle flaw. Too condescending, too put off by her work, too impolite to her friends and loved ones. She remembered the surgeon who had treated Jane and how despite his tenderness in bed, he had acted in a way that made him eventually repulsive. Then there are just as many men who decided against giving her a second or third glance because she was too awkward or too distant or too career-focused. There were those who were impressed by her science and yet reluctant to continue their relationships because ultimately, they did not want someone who would compete with them.

Jane never judged her and never turned her away. Well, Maura mentally amended, Jane’s judgments were not uncommon. They were nigh constant. However, they were done with kindness and were rarely serious. If Maura were turned away, it was usually due to fear and anger rather than disappointment or loathing. Often any judgment was made to reassure Maura of her desirability and normalcy. Being called goofy was paired with the insistence that Maura was a non-criminal, non-sociopath, worthy of love and attention. The constant attacks on her encyclopedic knowledge of the human condition were matched with constant respect and pursuit of Maura’s skills as a scientist.

And then there was Jane’s easy physicality. The other woman always wanted to embrace Maura, rustle her hair, pat her on the hip, and urge her closer on the couch when watching television. Maura had demurred at first, preferring her personal space and the distance instilled in her by her parents’ WASP culture. As the crush developed, Maura entered a push-pull relationship with the affection.
She began to crave every half-hug, every casual touch, occasionally being tempted to seek them out. Inevitably, she turned such affection away for fear it would unleash some of the emotions she had built up.

The crush had become insistent, like a rapidly expanding pruritic rash, and eventually metamorphosed into full-fledged unrequited longing. The simple, friendly love they shared raged into unidirectional lust. On the many nights Jane spent at Maura’s house, Maura envisioned climbing into the bed and kissing Jane. They would transform comfort and affection into something more passionate and sexually satisfying. She imagined letting her hands discover the woman underneath the hardened officer and Jane performing a similar inquiry into Maura’s hidden sexual nature. The fantasy had always terminated there, Maura’s logical mind reminding her that engaging in fantasies with a heterosexual friend was the very definition of pointless. Nonetheless, if Maura weren’t distracted by work or an active male lover, her brain would naturally progress to imagining the two of them together.

Therefore, it had been the almost exact fulfillment of Maura’s desires when Jane lay Maura down on the bed and resumed her unhurried exploration of Maura’s body. Here, in Jane’s bed, the object of Maura’s crush was happily and intently adoring her breasts, her wrists, the crook of her knees, and her back. Everywhere but the aching need between Maura’s legs. How Jane could be so restrained when she was usually so impulsive was beyond Maura’s ability to comprehend, not when Maura was so desperate to be touched. Mentally, she begged Jane to go lower and bring her some release from this tension, while simultaneously fearing Jane would change her mind. Having Jane do so before being more intimate would hurt less, Maura concluded, a bitter thought that clashed terribly with the sensations she was experiencing.

Perhaps Jane had sensed the shift in Maura’s mood, because she crawled up Maura’s body and administered a deep, passionate kiss, which was followed by a wicked smile. Jane let her mouth nibble its way down Maura’s neck, between her breasts, and down her stomach. She tilted her head up once, locking eyes with Maura and hesitating, waiting perhaps for a sign of consent to continue.

Maura wanted to convince Jane that this was what she wanted. That Maura would give Jane permission to do anything and everything Jane desired. That Maura trusted Jane enough to open herself in this most intimate, personal way.

However, all Maura could manage in her blissful state was a soft, “Please.”

With that, Jane progressed lower, using her fingertips to trace the outline of Maura’s sex before opening her and delicately exploring the wetness therein. Maura had let out a cry of pleasure and relief as the fingers brushed over her clit, then another as she felt Jane push forward and envelop Maura’s tingling bundle of nerves with her mouth.

Jane’s tongue had danced across her folds and her muscled arms wrapped themselves around Maura’s thighs, leaving Jane buried in the nexus of Maura’s pleasure. She could tell Jane was trying to hold back her ardor, trying to slowly tease her and draw the sensations out. Maura arched her hips, half-deliberately, hoping to entice her lover give her more. Her ploy succeeded and Jane tossed aside her restraint. Now Maura was being absolutely ravished by an eager, if not completely experienced tongue. The darker haired woman was fast and demanding, anxiously tasting and experimenting, looking for Maura’s response with every flick and swirl.

Maura had lost herself in the sensation of both the pleasure and the possessiveness of Jane’s touch. How Jane reached out to entwine her fingers with Maura’s while not breaking the contact with her sex. How Jane gave a growl of approval whenever Maura gasped or moaned. Eventually, Maura found herself writhing and winding her fingers in Jane’s long, curly black hair, pressing Jane’s face
into her body, begging for more with her body if she couldn’t consciously with her words. She whispered and then allowed herself to scream Jane’s name. It wasn’t planned as it might have been with other partners. It was a raw guttural need to let her lover know that what she was doing to Maura was all Maura wanted.

Maura had always felt the wave metaphor of orgasm to be overdone and cliché, but at this moment, she reconsidered. This orgasm was a tidal force, a tsunami of release, her need and desire taking away everything in her life but this moment of climax. The sensations were all-encompassing and left her gasping for air. The second that followed quickly thereafter was unexpected and no less intense.

After she had become too sensitive and tugged Jane away from her, the other woman had rested her head on Maura’s iliac crest and drawn her fingers up and down Maura’s thighs. Little goosebumps followed her fingertips and Maura weighed encouraging another round of sex against how tired and tingly she felt. She was more than sated, at least for the moment, and turned her attention towards Jane.

In these moments of vulnerability, she worried Jane would suddenly recognize what they were doing and back away. Plus, she held the simple fear that she would not be naturally skilled with the female form. As an anatomist, Maura had few peers. She could parlay that into a sexual encounter, she rationalized, but reading Jane like a cadaver was perhaps the least sexy thing she could do. Would Jane laugh if Maura got lost somehow or merely performed poorly?

It turned out scientific exploration and precise anatomy were unneeded when approaching Jane’s body. The other woman was wonderfully responsive and gave herself over easily and completely to Maura. Maura found herself enraptured by all the sounds and movements Jane made, enough that Maura wished she could spend hours determining the optimal position and pressure to generate the strongest orgasms. Such exploration would have been too much for her dear friend, who made it quite known to Maura that what she wanted was a more immediate release.

Once Jane had come down again, she reversed their positions once again. Maura had been rewarded with another two orgasms of her own, this time with Jane holding her down with her body weight and gazing deeply at Maura as she used her hands to bring the young woman to heights of pleasure. Opening her eyes and watching Jane as Maura began to slip over the edge of her climax was one of the most beautiful, intimate moments she could recall.

But then there had been the moment where it all switched. Jane had pulled Maura close and wrapped around her, spooning her and letting the full expanse of their bodies touch. Maura could feel the warm skin along her back and the strong hands that played her so well making figure eights on her abdomen. If she could have a sustainable source of nutrition, hydration, and waste excretion, Maura would have liked to have remained there forever.

In a drowsy tone, Jane sighed to Maura, “I never knew I would enjoy this so much. Now that I know, I don’t ever want to stop.” She kissed Maura’s ear and pulled her tightly into her body. “You are amazing. I am so lucky to have you.”

Maura had lain there, blinking and suddenly very awake. All of Maura’s fantasies had ended either with a haze of shared orgasm or confused rejection by her friend, if the fantasy were yet another vehicle for Maura’s self-doubt. Not one fantasy ended with Jane expressing a desire for further sexual encounters and an explicit claiming of Maura.

At that moment, Maura recognized this crush, having been realized to its fullest extent, was now on the cusp of becoming something more complicated than attraction. What was Maura supposed to do? How was Maura supposed to react? She had tried to tamp down the rising emotions of confusion and uncertainty, but eventually failed. The sentence had flipped every single one of Maura’s panic
switches and she made her escape.

Now, here they were. The divide between them seemed absolutely uncrossable. Thank goodness for Jane’s constant pursuit of her friend. Even if it weren’t sexual, Jane would not be one to abandon Maura. Jane had tackled bad guys, guided Maura after a car crash, and killed her terrifying nemesis, Dr. Hoyt, all to protect Maura. The young woman could not believe Jane would suddenly give up on her now, but why else would Jane be avoiding her?

She drew her fingertips through her hair, letting the strands pull back and fall naturally along her sharp features. It was all so confusing. Emotions were overwhelming on the best of days. On the worst of days, like today, they were streams of data in a foreign language. If only she could translate, she might have a chance of comprehending the onslaught.

Despite her turning Jane down, all she wanted was Jane nearby. She had been so sure that the encounter was a mistake, but the reason she gave was the less accurate one; limiting Jane’s career was far less of a concern than driving Jane away or losing Jane forever. Now that the possibility of sexual contact had been stopped by Maura’s request, Maura began to seriously reconsider the correctness of her actions. How did that even make sense? Maybe their dinner would be helpful.

Maura paced a few more minutes, then gave up. She set all the papers in order, tossed them neatly in a manila folder, and left autopsy.

“Senior Criminalist Chang,” she called behind her. “Please alert me if you make any discoveries.”

“Yes doctor,” replied the scientist, quietly grateful that Maura was retreating towards her best friend. The quantity of lab gossip when Maura and Jane were fighting was enough to bring most scientific progress to a standstill. No one wanted to admit evidence processing was a good 50% slower because everyone was trying to use their scientific knowledge to suss out the root of the current discord. Almost everyone was united behind this being a personal reason. Even covertly hacked emails and stealthily gained text messages provided no insight. Short of putting a wire on Dr. Isles, Susie and her labmates had to content themselves with conjecture.

Maura stalked across the bullpen, avoiding rolling chairs and the covertly admiring eyes of the many male officers who had come to appreciate her petite form. She stood once more in front of the trio of desks that housed Korsak, Frost, and her Jane, looking for a place to lay out her report. No such place was available.

Instead, every inch of the desks was covered with donuts. Dozens upon dozens of donuts, some in pink-striped boxes and some in neat carrying cases festooned with ribbons. A bevy of eating and shouting members of the BPD milled around Frost and Korsak, consuming the snacks with alarming speed. A young officer from the drug unit was dusted with enough powdered sugar that he appeared to have indulged in the products of a cocaine bust. Frankie was licking dollops of reddish cream from his fingers. Even Cavanaugh was there, slicing a tenth of a whole wheat donut in the hopes it would satisfy his craving without spiking his cholesterol.

A flash of ire crossed Maura’s face. “I thought we were working a murder case. Instead, I’ve stumbled into a donut bacchanalia,” she said, gesturing across the ever-dwindling spread of sweets.

Korsak chewed half of a chocolate glazed and puzzled at her. “Bak-a-what ne a,” he asked before letting out a belch. He glanced back and forth, hoping no one had heard him over the din.

“Real classy, Korsak,” replied Jane, who appeared suddenly from behind a filing cabinet. Maura’s
heart went fluttering as the lanky detective sauntered over to her partners and swiped the other half of his donut from the plate. “Didn’t your mother teach you any manners? Hell, didn’t my mother teach you any manners? You’re down in the café enough.”

Jane bit down and leaned back, catching a few crumbs in her hand, and allowing a now-familiar look of bliss to cross her face.

“A bacchanalia,” replied Maura, tearing her gaze from her friend’s enraptured expression, “was a celebration associated with the Roman god Bacchus, known as Dionysus to the Greeks. During these festivals, people secretly engaged in practices frowned upon by conventional Roman society, such as drunken fighting and sexual promiscuity.”

“You’re saying we’re having a donut orgy,” deadpanned Frost. “Why, Dr. Isles, I didn’t know you were aware of such behaviors. Didn’t you go to an all-girls school?”

Blood rose to her cheeks. “The study of Greco-Roman culture would be incomplete without a full exploration of their religious festivals, many of which contained fertility rituals involving copious amounts of sexual intercourse. Satyrs with enormous phalluses featured prominently in art depicting the bacchanalia.” The room was becoming uncomfortably warm and she couldn’t help but seek out Jane, but the woman had put her head down and was banging it on the table.

“Mauraaaa,” she whined. “I don’t want to think about having sex when eating donuts. Now all I’m picturing is some hairy guy with donuts on his…”

“Hey now,” interrupted Frankie. “There’s a lady present.” He gestured towards the doctor. Jane looked up and stuck her tongue out at him. “I’m deeply sorry for my sister’s crassness, Dr. Isles. I’ll make sure my mother washes her mouth out with soap next time we’re all together for dinner.”

Maura went to pat his hand, then remembered it was coated with his saliva. She tapped his shoulder instead. “That’s quite okay, Frankie. I’ve long since learned that Jane’s manners are beyond correcting.”

It was one of the most effective baits that Maura could use. An insult directed at Jane in front of her friends and family never failed to bring out Jane’s combative side. Maura craved that. At least when Jane was blinded by emotions, she would be open with Maura again. She’d stop holding back. Sure enough, Jane rolled back from the desk and stomped over to Maura. The fire in her eyes sent a rush through the pathologist.

“You’re lecturing me on manners,” she said, pointing her finger sternly at her brother, then rotated her arm so it was focused on Maura, “and you’re agreeing with him? Since when is my brother the authority on good behavior? Have you ever seen him eat dinner? Elbows on the table every damn time.”

Maura pulled back a little. Perhaps this wasn’t the best way to engage Jane right now. How much of the anger and passion was teasing and how much was true hurt?

“I was just saying that as we get older, we tend to get set in our ways,” said Maura, attempting to placate the grouchy detective.

Jane threw her hands in the air then stormed back to her desk, no longer listening. The heat from her presence vanished, leaving Maura in the emotional cold. Maura contracted her body, curving inward in embarrassment. She should have known better. Before an apology could leave her lips, a pale green donut on a crinkled napkin was thrust in front of her.
“Yeah, well, at least I have enough manners to remember you don’t like greasy desserts. I had Frost get you this abomination so you wouldn’t feel left out.” Maura looked up into Jane’s eyes. Warmth returned as she searched out Jane’s features. The tone was aggravated but the look was pure love. Maura took the proffered pastry, enjoying a few milliseconds of skin-to-skin contact with this amazing woman.

Frost came over and pointed with one sturdy finger. “It is a gluten-free, vegan kale donut with organic lemon frosting from Thea’s Donut Shack.” He tilted his balding head towards his partner.

“Jane called me up just as we were leaving to make sure we brought back something for you. Not that anyone would want to eat that,” he said, shaking his head. “I never thought I would encounter a donut from Thea’s that I wouldn’t want to eat, but the moment I saw that, I knew I was wrong.”

Maura stopped listening midway through the insult to her dessert. She took a tentative nibble. The flavor was odd and the clash between the citrus of the lemon and the boldness of the kale not quite appropriate for a confection. It didn’t matter. She finished the whole thing in five bites. Jane had gotten it for her. Jane had taken care of her, as always. No one would be as good to her as Jane would be.

“Damn girl,” said Jane with a whistle. “I don’t know how you keep that figure if you can shotgun a donut like that. Even if that thing looks like barf and play-doh, it’s still deep fried.” Her eyes appreciated Maura and trailed from the top of her head down along her body.

Maura arched her eyebrows and found herself angling towards Jane. “Well, I know when to indulge and when to restrain…myself.” Her words caught in her throat. Jane’s face fell and she pursed her lips, trying to rearrange her expression into familiar aggravation. A silent beat passed.

“Annywaay,” said Frost, “We’re eating donuts because there’s literally nothing else to do right now. The techs are still combing this guy’s house and tracking down his contacts. Hell, we don’t even know if Ralph Lauren is his real name, so we’re going nowhere. Fast.”

“Have you located the original crime scene,” Maura enquired.

“Maybe,” said Frost, waving his hands. “There’s a missing window on the fifth floor of the Prudential center, which corresponds to your estimate of his fall distance.” He nodded appreciatively towards the doctor, who felt a flush of accomplishment. “Unfortunately, we haven’t been able to get to it because, surprise, surprise, a building full of lawyers and high-end businessmen won’t let us in without a warrant. They say the evidence is circumstantial.”

“But they could be contaminating my scene,” said Maura with a tinge of panic. “Certainly they must recognize the importance of evidence integrity.”

“Not to worry. While we’re waiting for a judge who they haven’t paid off, we’re allowed to put a few uniforms near that office to keep everyone else out. Your crime scene will be fine, Dr. Isles,” reassured Frost. “Why not take the rest of the evening off? Jane says you two are due for a girls’ night out.”

Jane glared at him and hissed through gritted teeth. “I did not, Frost.” Her posture was rigid and her hands clenched in an effort, Maura was certain, to keep from tossing a donut at her partner.

“I appreciate the thought, Detective Frost, but I’m sure Jane is extremely busy with other cases,” Maura replied in a mollifying tone.

“No, I insist.” Lieutenant Cavanaugh strolled over and snuck another donut into his suit pocket,
enveloping it in a napkin with his left hand as he gestured with his right. “You two work so damn hard. Enjoy the lull. We’ll call when something happens.”

Maura looked hopefully at Jane, who wouldn’t meet her gaze. “It might be nice to have a bit of a break, Jane. Don’t you think?” She didn’t know her internal voice, the one usually so calm and scientific, could be so mentally demanding. All it wanted right now was to spend however many hours she could muster with Jane.

The tall detective slumped and walked towards her chair, scooping up her jacket and sliding it on. “Fine. Fine. We’ll go for a ‘girls night out’. Any other suggestions, boys? Should we go to… whatever the male equivalent of Hooters would be?”

“I don’t know,” replied Frost with a grin. “Just try not to get too drunk on fruity umbrella drinks. You know, cocktails for girls?”

Before Maura could reply, Jane reached out and tugged her elbow. This was the first time Jane had deliberately touched her since Friday. Sure, it was a bit rough, but long fingers cupping her arms and pulling her into Jane were still things Maura craved.

“Come on Maura,” she growled, half-pulling Maura out of the precinct. “Let’s go before they force-feed you a Boston crème donut.”

Behind them, the four men who knew them best lined up and watched the two women leave.

“Think they’ll work it out,” asked Frankie hopefully.

“I hope so,” said Cavanaugh grimly. “No one will get a damn thing done until they do. I swear those two remind me of an old married couple half of the time.”

“Hey, if any of my wives and I had half the chemistry they do, we’d still be married,” noted Korsak. Then, the boys all chuckled and went back to their donuts.

Maura was glad she had chosen this restaurant. Chic without being pretentious, with a menu that had an acceptable mix of comfort food and experimental cuisine. Plus it was dark, private, and very busy. Normally she might find the clinking of glasses and clatter of plates disruptive. Given the gravity of the conversation on which Jane and she were about to embark, however, background noise would do well to fill the inevitable awkward pauses.

Well, that was if she and Jane ever got to have a real conversation. The previous 20 minutes had been full of settling in and complaining. Jane had taken to grousing about the overly upscale presentation of ordinary food. Florid descriptions of what amounted to a burger and fries or spaghetti carbonara provided Jane with enough ammunition to monopolize the first 10 minutes with her whining, followed by two minutes of being offended when Maura accused her of whining. Then there was Jane ranting about the men pushing them out the door of the police station, with Maura agreeing the invasion of their privacy was unwelcome but nonetheless effective in making them go out.

Somewhere between the appetizers in the first course, Jane broke the chatter of trivialities and her sharp features dropped into a serious expression. She glanced around to ensure the waiter had hustled off to the kitchen, took in a deep breath and said, “Maura, I’m trying to figure out how the hell we got here. I know, you explained it on Friday, and I’m trying to respect it.”
Maura nodded but didn’t interrupt.

“I can tell there’s something still bothering you. Everyone knows by now that you only call me Detective Rizzoli,” continued Jane, waving her suit clad arms in the air and crooking the fingers with air quotes, “under two circumstances. One is when you’re making fun of me, which you weren’t, and two is when you’re angry with me. For once I don’t know what’s wrong.”

The doctor recognized how difficult it was for Jane to be this open and honest, especially in a public place. Then again, Jane was the one who suggested dinner and the implication had been something other than a home-cooked meal or greasy takeout. Diffusion of the emotional load might be achieved in a place where social norms dictated Jane remain calm. Perhaps she didn’t trust herself not to become enraged in private.

Maura folded and then refolded her napkin. The coarse cloth didn’t shape well and her attempts to craft a swan were an unsuccessful outlet for her disquiet. She should have protested the dinner’s sudden onset so she had time to create a cogent argument, a logical discourse on her emotions that she could refer to whenever she was confronted. No such position paper had been prepared when the men pushed them out of the office that evening. Instead, she was just here with Jane.

She started, “I think,” and then stopped. No, she didn’t think right now, did she? She hadn’t thought at the time, either.

“I want you to know,” she retried. That also failed. She didn’t want Jane to know. She wanted Jane. Not merely a conveyance of information. The actual, wonderful, beautiful, needful woman in front of her. Maura took a page from Jane’s book and went with her emotions, for once.

“You haven’t done anything wrong. I have,” said Maura. She paused. “I’ve fallen in love with you.”

Jane heaved a sigh that mixed with a wry smile. “Well, I know that. I’ve known that for years. Only someone who really loves me could put up with half of the crap I dish out.”

No levity crossed Maura’s face. “No. More than that. The feelings I experience when I am near you have come to include eros in addition to the appropriate expressions of storge and philia.”

A moment passed and Jane wrinkled her brow. “If I remember my Latin…”

“Greek,” corrected Maura. “These are Grecian, not Roman, terms.”

The brow wrinkle turned into a covert eye roll. “Fine. If I remember my Greek, philia is brotherly love or something? Which is why when you go to Philadelphia, you love eating the cheesesteak. I’ve never heard of storge, but I’m guessing it’s the type of love you feel when you buy a condo and there’s enough closet space for your shoe collection.”

Maura turned her gaze away from the angled, beautiful face and focused on the tablecloth. It was cheap in its manufacture, detracting from her opinion of the chicness of the restaurant. She tried to distract herself from her humiliation by thinking of a review she’d write for the dining experience later.

“You’re mocking me,” she said, not taking her eyes off the waxed weave. ‘Promising but disappointing’ would be what she’d title the review. Much like everything else these days.

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“Greek,” corrected Maura. “These are Grecian, not Roman, terms.”
All of Maura’s attention went into the touch of skin on her own. The tablecloth could have transformed from polyester to barbed wire and to damask. She wouldn’t have noticed. She didn’t want to move but her claustrophobic fear of public emotions overtook her and she drew her arm back, placing both hands in her lap.

“Yes,” Maura admitted. Back to contemplating the tablecloth. Would it be worth speaking with the manager on the way out to let him know her opinion of his business had been deeply affected by his subpar taste in table linens?


Jane fell silent and, according to Maura’s internal count, nineteen uncomfortable seconds passed. Maura willed herself to look upward. Jane’s face was perched on her palm, long fingers drumming on her cheek. The other woman was staring at some point to the left of Maura’s head. Her expression was thoughtful and slightly distant. Another 38 seconds passed until Maura could no longer take the silence and attempted to restart the conversation.

“I know it’s silly and not what I ever intended. Please let me reassure you that I attempted to keep things professional. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner or that I’ve told you at all. I can’t believe this happened?”

Her voice trailed off in an uncharacteristic up tone. Jane was rarely lost in thought and it made Maura nervous when her talkative friend was rendered taciturn. Was she upset or offended? Bored? Tired? Enraged?

“No, Maura, it makes sense,” observed Jane in a thoughtful tone. “Half of my boyfriends were my friends first, including Casey. Most of the guys who keep trying to sleep with me are my coworkers. Ugh. Martinez,” she sneered. “That cocky bastard thought that working together meant he and I had some deep sexual chemistry. You agreed, remember? Subtle signs of sexual arousal…” mocked Jane, shifting her eyes from the dimly-lit décor to her sheepish friend’s face.

“Yes, well, I still think Raphael was attracted to you.” The tanned detective’s face flickered into her imagination. He was a rugged, handsome man who seemed just as interested in pursuing Jane as Maura was.

“Exactly,” pounced Jane. “He’s attracted to me even though we were merely colleagues. Yeah, we worked a few late nights together, but not as many as you and I. And let’s not forget that you and I also spend most of our non-work hours together. This is totally natural.”

Maura was bewildered. “You’re not upset?”

“Why would I be upset that a brilliant, beautiful woman fell in love with me? Even more when that person is my best friend, who I know loves me despite everything I put her through.”

“Because…you’re not gay,” argued Maura. Why was she arguing? She didn’t want to argue. She wanted to accept and agree.

A gentle snort came as the reply. “Neither are you. And think of all the gorgeous, gay male actors who still get women’s panties in the mail from legions of women wanting to be the exception. Who you are doesn’t actually affect who falls in love with you.”

Maura leaned forward in offense. “Oh, so I’m as pathetic as a woman who sends lingerie-based tokens of affection to a man she will never meet and whose sexuality she can never hope to change?”

Jane drooped. “Maura, sometimes I swear you take the things I say and stuff them through a
translator to make them as hurtful as possible. No, what I mean is having someone attracted to me is a complement, regardless of gender.” She paused. “I mean, as long as the person isn’t a crazy creep who is obsessed with me because he’s a serial killer,” corrected Jane.

“I think we can both agree that we should be done with serial killers for a while,” observed Maura. “Either professionally or personally.”

The two women stopped and smiled at each other. Perhaps the waiter knew a break in conversation had occurred as he swooped in to deposit their food then vanished, leaving the two with their dinner. Jane took a bite of her pasta. She swallowed and frowned.

“Ugh, what the hell did the chefs use as the base for this cream sauce? Velveeta?” She clinked her fork back down. “I swear there isn’t one restaurant outside of the North End that can make an alfredo not taste like EZ-Cheese. Haven’t these guys ever encountered good Romano?”

With one disapproving finger, she prodded the edge of Maura’s food. “And what’s that? It looks like an unfortunate accident involving a lawn mower and a raccoon.”

“It’s steak tartare, dusted with cornmeal and southwestern spices, with a cranberry reduction and mesclun salad,” observed Maura. She pointed at each element of her meal. The dish, presented in a raw and lightly oozing mass nestled into the greens, did look like a heap of chopped flesh. Jane was appropriately horrified.

“You’re eating raw meat? The woman who makes me wash my eggs before I crack them into a frying pan is eating raw meat? You never get to complain about my kitchen cleanliness again.” Jane took another bite of pasta, perhaps to cut herself off from ranting.

“You refuse to buy organic, free-range eggs,” protested Maura. “Conventional eggs are covered in salmonella. I don’t want you to get sick!”

Jane put down her fork, crossed her hands in front of her, and smiled at Maura. “You know, if Casey said that to me, I’d accuse him of being all protective and domestic. Meanwhile, I think I’d be offended if you stopped, no matter how much I complain.”

Maura poked at her pile of meat. It was beginning to warm up from its customary chilled temperature. This greatly increased the risk of latent bacteria beginning to activate. Also, the mention of Casey filled Maura with disquiet. In sleeping with Jane, she had technically caused Jane to cheat on Casey. The couple had been through that once before, but the relationship at that point had been loose enough for Agent Dean to sneak in. Now the soldier and detective were more solid. Yet here was Maura in an uncomfortable role as homewrecker.

Maura’s face must have telegraphed her discomfort, since Jane pushed aside her food and leaned forward again.

“Maura, don’t worry about Casey and me. I love him. I really do. But the reality is he and I are living very different lives and one of us will need to give up everything to be with the other. I don’t think I’m willing to do that for someone I love, no matter how special. He will understand if I try something with you now.”

Maura’s eyes widened and her heart began an impossible pattern that reminded her of ventricular tachycardia. “Try…something with me?”

Jane’s face was a strange combination of excited and pensive. “Yes. You know, a relationship. That’s why this all happened, right? I say let’s give it a try. I’ve done crazier things.”
Maura felt like she had been subjected to an extreme force from an unknown object. Jane was giving Maura the opportunity Maura had been dreaming of for months. Not just sex, but love, closeness, a real partnership. Exactly what Maura wanted, which was why she turned it down.

“I appreciate your willingness,” she said, gathering herself up into her customary reserved posture. “However, I don’t think we should pursue this farther than it has already gone.”

Jane could not have shut down more quickly than if Maura had told her Hoyt was back. “After this heartfelt conversation in which you divulge your secret love for me, you’re changing your mind?”

“No, never,” objected Maura. “I could never stop…feeling the way I do. But I think it’s best if we don’t keep going in this way.”

Jane ran frustrated fingers through her hair. “Because you don’t want to ruin my career prospects? I think we both know that’s not accurate.”

Maura looked at Jane, whose face was a raw battle of emotions. “You’re right.” She let her heart flutter more, then divulged the rest of her truth. “I don’t think we should pursue this relationship because I am afraid I’ll lose you one day.”

“But Maura,” said Jane beseechingly, “think of all the times I’ve been in the hospital or that I’ve been kidnapped or in a shootout. You always run the risk of losing me because that’s my job. I made an oath to lay down my life in the service of the city. We don’t have to be…you know…” Jane glanced around, attempting to be subtle. “Having sex,” she continued in a fake whisper, “for this to be the case.”

“I know, Jane,” said Maura softly. She reached out a cool hand, then retracted it to fidget with the salt shaker. “Your willingness to sacrifice yourself is often foolish but ultimately admirable.”

“Gee thanks,” sighed Jane.

Maura patted the crystal surface of the shaker in lieu of trying to touch her friend. “It isn’t meant unkindly. You hurtle into danger without thought for your own safety or the outcome of your actions. You never think about what it will do to the people who love you should you get hurt.”

“So what? I shouldn’t chase a bad guy down an alley because it might upset you if I end up in the hospital again?” Jane’s tone became combative and she fidgeted restlessly with her silverware, tapping the side of her fork against her glass if she were preparing to make a wedding speech.

“Absolutely not,” said Maura, offended that her friend would even contemplate that. “I would no more interfere with your role as a detective than you would my role as medical examiner. You would never have me derelict my duty even if I were brought into contact with a body infected with Ebola, for example, or an extremely purulent form of gangrene…”

“Yeah, I got it Maura,” said Jane, rubbing her for head with pinched fingers. “Okay, forget I said that. But it’s true. When I act, I don’t think about myself or the people I love. And I don’t know what it means that I’m willing to lay my life down for stranger but not willing to protect my life for people who love me.”

“It means you’re an amazing police officer, Jane,” reassured Maura. “It means that you exemplify the selflessness and devotion that people need to expect from those who defend them. I would never say you should be less of who you are just for me.”

Jane folded her fingertips in front of her and leaned her forehead dejectedly on her thumbs. “But it means that you would wait by the door every night wondering if I’m going to come home.”
Maura didn’t admit how many nights she had spent doing just that. Sometimes with Angela by her side, fretting and cooking. Other times curled up with her cell phone on the couch, waiting for the call that would summon Maura to a crime scene, to a hospital, or to a morgue bearing Jane’s broken body. More tears had soaked into those cushions over Jane than Maura would ever admit.

“We’ve been on the force how many years,” continued Jane. “In that time, how many couples, even cop couples, do we know that split up because one of them was tired of drinking cold coffee and chain smoking cigarettes at 3AM whenever the other was on the job?” She let out a resigned sigh.

“Nine,” replied Maura. “And it’s not just the fear of divorce, Jane.” She took in a breath. “This may sound terrible, but I’ve always thought of getting married to someone who would…be there when you weren’t.”

Jane’s face shifted into one of bafflement. “Yes, Maura, that’s what marriage means. Being there. Doing chores and paying bills and picking out dust ruffles while your friends do something more fun.” Her tone was flat and slightly confused, much as it was whenever Jane was attempting to follow one of Maura’s scientific fields of inquiry.

Maura tried to explain. “I always expected you would get married too. You’ve had numerous potential sexual partners and it’s only your fear of commitment stopping you, which is another reason I have reconsidered our pairing. That and your mother’s need for grandchildren…”

Maura could tell this conversation was not pleasing her friend. Jane’s cocked eyebrow and slackened jaw were beginning to drift apart further and further until Maura feared Jane might wrench her face in two from incredulity. She continued, undeterred.

“I’ve always pictured us having husbands because, I always believed…” Maura fidgeted with one of her rings, not allowing herself to look Jane in the face anymore.

“If I were married, I’d at least have someone else to love me if you died in the line of duty. Not because that person could ever replace you but because it would mean I had somebody left.” Maura battled her emotions, willing her voice to be steady. “If I love you in this way, it means I lose everything if you die. But I would never have you stop being this amazing detective just to protect me and my feelings.”

“Maura,” said Jane softly. “I…already try to protect you. Some of the most hellish moments of my life have been watching someone harm you,” said Jane, her voice becoming thick with emotion. “I don’t think I could be tortured more effectively than to watch you…” Jane shook her head and looked up away from Maura, beads of tears threatening to work their way out of the detective’s eyes. “Let’s just say I would have let Hoyt dismember me if it meant you could escape. Seeing you bruised because I couldn’t get you out of jail fast enough…”

Maura thanked and cursed her upbringing for allowing her to restrain her emotions. Thanked because she didn’t want to collapse in public. Cursed because she wanted to let Jane know how hard this was for Maura. She was able to keep herself calm when she formed her reply.

“When you were kidnapped, I was watching you in that room, watching him hurt you. I couldn’t stop him, Jane; all I could do was watch. You were calling for Frost, over and over, because you knew I couldn’t do anything for you. I couldn’t analyze the evidence fast enough and I couldn’t warn you before you were taken.”

Maura’s control over her feelings began to slip and her voice cracked. She ducked her head downward so Jane couldn’t see her struggling.
“If it weren’t for Frost, you would have died. All because I failed.”

Jane gripped Maura’s hands tightly. “You never fail, Maura. You did everything you could that day for me. You do everything you can every day. Even if you don’t succeed, you never fail.”

Maura pushed back her sadness to correct her friend. “That’s not possible, Jane. The definition of success includes not failing.”

“See? You just succeeded in proving me wrong. Something that I know is not possible, since I am right when it comes to these things, right?” Jane’s teasing was back, this time performing its duty as an act of affection. Jane’s voice took on the pleading, serious tone she reserved for Maura at the doctor’s most self-hating times.

“I called for Frost because he had the technology to find the computer. But I knew you would be able to interpret details with your encyclopedia of pointless knowledge. Almost any geek can hack a video stream, Maura. Not everyone can identify an apartment from a radiator.”

Jane pulled Maura closer, as much as they could with two plates of food, a well-set table, and a decorative carnation in the way. “You are remarkable. Unique. Singular, if I am borrowing vocabulary from a crossword puzzle. If loving me with eros is painful, we won’t do it, okay? Just tell me I won’t lose the…” Jane rolled her eyes, “Other…two…Greek love words?”

Maura knew Jane’s detective skills well enough to determine when Jane was lying. Jane remembered all three Greek words, their definitions, and the context in which they were used. It was probable Jane had encountered the words before and had concealed the knowledge so Maura could engage in a professorial display. This was Jane’s way of dumbing herself down so Maura could feel more stable on her customary intellectual pedestal, because Jane wanted Maura to feel safe. Jane would deliberately strip away her own self to protect Maura because Jane loved her more than anyone else would or could.

This was the epiphany Maura did not know she had been waiting for. Anyone who she used to replace Jane would serve as a constant source of eros, but fundamentally that person could never hope to approach what Jane gave her. Any other relationship would be background noise. She could not imagine a future where she abandoned Jane to pursue a husband any more than she could imagine a future where she abandoned medicine. Maura had made a terrible mistake.

“We won’t lose them, Jane,” said Maura. Before Maura could try to redirect the conversation back towards the epiphany, the detective’s phone buzzed.

Jane growled a curse and dropped Maura’s hands so she could fish out her cell phone. Maura wanted to grab one back, use it as an anchor for her explanation of why Maura was completely wrong. Instead, she watched the conversation flicker across Jane’s face. Annoyance, aggravation, extreme annoyance, frustration, resigned annoyance.

Jane huffed and clicked the phone closed. “Okay, listen, do you think you can get a doggie bag in the time it takes me to bring the car around?” She pointed at the congealing food with the end of her phone. “I don’t know how well cornmeal covered raw hamburger with mixed mescaline will do in a microwave, but we’re going to find out.”

Maura cocked an eyebrow at Jane in confusion. “Where are you going? And it’s mesclun. Mescaline is a hallucinogen derived from the peyote cactus, often used by Native Americans in religious rituals.”

“Yes, I know,” growled Jane, tossing her napkin off her lap. “I worked the drug unit for how long?
Anyway. You know Thomas Olesch? New guy in homicide?"

“Oh, yes,” said Maura, tapping her fingers. “Pale man, thinning hair, Midwestern accent. He has a very prominent stomach. I have been meaning to ask him if he has been checked for ascites.”

Jane shoved the phone into her pocket and rifled through her hair. “No, Maura, you don’t introduce yourself by asking if someone has rabies or scabies or ascites. The only time you care about parasites is when they’re helping us in a murder case.”

“It’s not a parasite,” sighed Maura. “It’s a fluid collection asso…”

Jane waved her off and stood up. “Anyway, he’s been working some stupid robbery-gone-bad. They just busted six kids and he wants me to come in to help question them. Something about time sensitive information? I owe him a favor.”

Maura’s face fell. The conversation was ending right as it needed to restart. Jane reached down and tugged Maura’s wrist.

“Oh, you get the waiter to wrap this up and bring the check. I’ll handle the tip. You think $20 will be enough?” Jane rooted through her pockets for a few bill, then stopped. “Wait, no, I’ll let you do math based on that goddamn magic algorithm you swear generates the most fair gratuity every time.” That wonderful, frustrated voice. “Another 10 minutes onto every dinner as you use your phone as an abacus.”

Maura retracted her hand. “I don’t think I’ll be much help questioning a group of robbers,” she protested.

Jane grabbed her hand again, pulling harder. “Then you can use your behavioral neuropsychology to tell me which of these dopes are lying.”

Maura didn’t pull back. She searched Jane’s face. Love, perennial aggravation, and a hint of fear that Maura didn’t expect.

“I would still be superfluous. You have been a detective long enough to outsmart your average mook, as we call them,” noted Maura.

“Yeah, in a 1950’s cop thriller.” Jane tensed her body. “Maura, I don’t want to abandon you in a restaurant. Come with me. This stuff is always better when you’re there. Maybe you’ll learn something?”

“You’re not abandoning me,” noted Maura. That was the source of the fear, wasn’t it? Recreating William’s cruel actions that had eventually brought herself and Jane together. “You are going to do your job while I finish an admittedly overpriced meat dish.” Maura let an unforced smile cross her face. “I’ll be fine. I will bring your food home and keep it from growing an unfortunate culture of Staph aureus while it’s lukewarm.”

“Eww.” Jane’s face lit up in spite of her protest. “I’ll grab it tomorrow, then? After work?”

“It’ll be waiting for you right next to the broccoli, assuming the cheese sauce doesn’t cancel it out in an explosion. You know, sort of like a matter/antimatter collision,” grinned Maura. “Now go to the station. I’m certain your expertise is required.”

Jane squeezed Maura’s hand one last time and whirled out of the restaurant, leaving Maura alone.

Maura poked her dinner with her fork a few more times. It had become completely unappealing. Not just because, well, of the way it looked but because Jane wasn’t here to lovingly make fun of it. Food
tasted better when Jane was there. Life was better when Jane was there. Now that they had had this
conversation, Maura couldn’t imagine her life without Jane as the focus. Maura now had the
unenviable task of disentangling the web of distance she thought she had wanted to weave. Well, she
had gotten herself into it. Certainly she could get herself out of it.

She signaled the waiter one more time, pulling up her napkin neatly and placing it to the side of her
dish. He breezed over and looked down at her, indicating both plates, somewhat hesitantly. “One
bag…or two…? I’m not sure if your companion …"

"You may pack them up together. Be sure to place a layer of cardboard between the two so they do
not cross contaminate. As you know, raw meat is much more likely to hold bacteria that cooked."

He nodded and food disappeared, leaving Maura alone, though not uncomfortably. The kind of
solitude that encourages thinking rather than self-loathing. There might be time tomorrow to pull Jane
aside and reinitiate this conversation. She began playing the conversation out in her head, pushing
aside the parts that inevitably ended with Jane in her bed, making up for lost time.

A little while later, her food reappeared, along with the check. She opened up the leather-bound
book. $100, a figure that would send Jane squalling over the relative expense. Maura could imagine
Jane saying, “For that kind of money, they could at least cook the food, right? Or is slapping the
damn thing on a frying pan for five minutes another $30 extra?”

Maura looked up at him and let a half smile escape. “I know this may sound silly, but is it possible
for you to cook my dish into hamburger? Perhaps with a toasted sesame seed bun, romaine lettuce,
fresh scallions and sliced heirloom tomatoes? And a side of russet potato fries?”

He gave a patient smile that signaled a well-trained waiter who had entertained a variety of high test
patrons. “I will see that I can do, ma’am.” He took her credit card and returned to the kitchen. Her
thoughts once again drifted to the ways in which she would reunite with Jane. Perhaps she would
invite herself over to Jane’s apartment? No, that had too many bad memories. Maura could conjure
an excuse for Jane to come over tomorrow night. Jane was often receptive to staying with Maura in
times of need that Maura could use some sort of…artifice? Maura shook her head. No, she never
needed artifice with Jane. Asking Jane to stay over, even without a reason, would be quite enough
for the beautiful detective.

A few more delicious moments of fantasy later, the waiter reappeared with a bag smelling very
strongly of newly cooked hamburger, as well as her receipt.

“I had the chef prepare a new dish, ma’am. The chef and I thought your friend would prefer a
slightly more authentic form of American hamburger.”

Maura blushed. “Thank you. I’m sure she will be very appreciative.”

He disappeared once again and Maura peered at her receipt. She pulled out her phone to calculate the
optimal tip for this young man, based on market rates for the individual pieces of food, cost-of-living,
and his likely seniority at the restaurant. Then she reconsidered, left a $20 bill, and went home.

When the doors opened on the fifth floor of the Prudential building, it was all Jane Rizzoli could do
to keep from pitching forward out of the burnished metal elevator into the hallway. She glanced
around, trying to get her bearings in the dimly-lit corridor whose signs failed to indicate who or what
might be lurking within. The unhelpful security guards in the lobby had displayed no interest in
assisting her towards her destination even when she reminded them of the recent murder on their
doorstep. Three hours of sleep plus their useless attitude equaled one grumpy detective this fine Tuesday morning.

A stout young officer in a freshly pressed deep blue uniform appeared from around the corner.

“Detective Rizzoli,” she called in a thick Southie accent. “Ovah heah.” One hand gestured towards the tall brunette while the other proffered a Styrofoam cup of black coffee. With a mumble of thanks, Jane took the liquid and downed half of it in a mouth-burning sip. It didn’t matter if her tastebuds were seared off. Any infusion of caffeine would make this day go better.

“They said y’ad need some. Detective Koasak is inside interviewing the staff.”

“Have they started looking through the crime scene, Officer,” Jane glanced at the smaller woman’s ample chest. “O’Malley?”

“No, ma’am,” she replied. “They said they wanted to wait for you.”

“How thoughtful,” Jane grumbled to herself. She followed the short woman’s rapid footsteps down the hallway to a set of frosted glass doors. “Sustainable Solutions” was embossed in an imposing font across the front, flanked with an abstract swirling pattern of dots. Jane squinted at it, trying to determine if there were something obscene hidden within, but gave up within seconds as the doors were swung open by Officer O’Malley.

Jane strode into the office. The glare of bright blue LEDs refracting off engraved “Good Citizenship” awards briefly blinded her until her tired eyes adjusted to the brilliant interior. She looked around blearily at the modern corporate sitting room, trying to locate the rest of the team among the inspirational posters, soaring nature photography, and primly dressed corporate secretaries.

She strolled up to the front desk, flashed her badge, and said, “Hi. I’m Detective Jane Rizzoli. Boston homicide.”

An olive-skinned woman with bright blue hair glanced up from her computer and swiveled aside her headset mic. A tortured sigh escaped her lips.

“Turn left, past the Thai panorama, and make your first right. Your people are waiting there.”

Jane unleashed a practiced scowl. “Excuse me, are we inconveniencing you with our murder investigation? Or would you like to be put first on my list of possible suspects.”

The woman rolled her eyes, which Jane noted were the same unearthly shade of blue as her hair, and pointed towards the hall. “They have already questioned me. I have fifteen formal photo shoots, two interviews, and one brief TV appearance that prove I was in Atlanta all weekend for the annual comic convention.” She tapped her computer and flipped the screen up to face Jane. The young woman in front of her, wearing a mere smattering of clothing and what appeared to be a fifty-pound greatsword, smiled back from a mix of eager teen males.

Repositioning her computer, the secretary said, “Also, yes, it is an inconvenience to have a group of heavily-armed men and women tromping through our offices. We pride ourselves on our environmentally friendly, tranquil, customer-supportive atmosphere. You are ruining our feng sui.”

The continuation of the argument was prevented by the slightly winded appearance of Korsak.

“Hi Jane. Come on back,” he said quickly. “Dr. Isles is getting ready to open the crime scene.”

Jane pivoted away from the desk, allowing one last dirty look at the admin, before following him
down the hall.

“Feng shui. I’ll show her Feng shui. All feng shui her all the way down…”

“Easy there, Skipper,” he said, jostling her with his shoulder. “Long night?”

“If you only knew,” she mumbled to herself.

“Yeah, I heard. Olesch was pretty thrilled you were there to give up a hand. I heard they finished the rest of the bust today.”

Jane took another searing sip of her coffee. She didn’t feel like telling Korsak her night was further complicated by a troubled and shifting love life involving her best friend. She rolled her own eyes at herself. When did she become so melodramatic?

“You know me. Always glad to help.”

Korsak dragged her down another hallway and they walked by a scenic view of what could have been Thailand should Jane have paid any attention during history. From within nearby offices, various workers in tailored suits peered up anxiously and then looked away as the grumpy figure of the detective stormed by.

At last they reached the final door of the hallway. Unlike the others, this one was closed. Two more uniforms stood in front and nodded at the detective, who peered at a pair of gold-embossed nameplates. The one featuring the name “Dr. Arnold Roginksy, DDS” was placed in the center. About an inch underneath, a second plaque with the name “Doctor Tina Nader, DDS” reflected Jane’s face. Her distorted features looked back, with dark rimmed eyes and sagging skin indicating just how damn tired she was.

“Ugh. A dentist. I hate the dentist. I swear every teeth cleaning is done by sadists who love holding conversations with people who can’t talk back. And that drill sound? I swear…”

Korsak snickered, grabbed the doorknob, and ushered her in. “You’re gonna love this.”

The inner office was decorated with maroon throw pillows, low oak tables, and dragon-covered wall hanging that screamed, “I got this on the street in Chinatown.” A five foot high statue of the Buddha gazed at her imposingly from the far wall and wisps of newly placed incense curled around his placid demeanor.

Jane leaned over and whispered to Korsak, “When did we walk into the setting of kung fu movie?”

Before she could appreciate his chuckling reply, she saw Maura. Jane’s mouth went dry and her heart still fluttered. It would take time for her to repress the newly quashed feelings to keep both from being hurt further. Maura’s cream-colored suit and purple shirt, the one that flattered her so well, were a beacon of comfortable sanity in the middle of this bizarre circumstances.

“Jane,” said Maura cheerfully. “Isn’t it lovely? This is decorated just like the Jintai Temple in the Guangdong Province. I’ve never seen this Buddha rendered so well outside of a museum.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she said to Maura, moving to a second door at the far wall. Another two police officers stood near a silent male secretary glaring at her from behind his desk “You can tell me all about gong dongs once we get through this door to our crime scene.”

Jane paused and stared at Maura. “Are we expecting another dead body in there, Maura? You don’t usually come out to most crime scenes without one.”
Maura gave her a slightly peeved look. “Not gong dongs. Guangdong. Regardless, I am the most qualified person to survey a medical office and determine what, if anything, could be used for surgery. Unless you think we should find a forensic dentist, which I am certain does not exist.”

“They do, believe it or not, Dr. Isles. However, it is difficult to find one on short notice. I offered to query my colleagues but I was informed this was a time sensitive matter.”

Everyone bunched into the tiny front office turned to greet their newest guest. He was a tall man with a clipped brown beard and startling green eyes. He smiled, revealing two rows of immaculate white teeth, and extended his hand towards her best friend.

“Dr. Arnold Roginsky. A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Dr. Isles, though I wish it were under other circumstances.”

“You as well, doctor. And please, call me Maura.” Maura’s greeting was coupled with a quick appreciative sweep of her eyes over the handsome man’s body. Jane had surreptitiously done the same. He was ridiculously good looking and, Jane’s recent lesbian experiences notwithstanding, she found herself wondering what he would look like if she peeled him out of his glittering Armani suit.

“Of course. Arnold.” He turned his piercing gaze towards her. “And you are…Detective Rizzoli?”

“I see my reputation precedes me,” she said, shaking his hand. It was warm, soft, and, Jane quickly noted, not adorned with a wedding ring.

“If by reputation, you mean your history of dedicated service and sacrifice in the line of duty.” Another flash of that inviting, disarming grin.

He gestured towards the door behind him. “I have heard you believe a man committed suicide from my office. What a terrible tragedy.”

Jane cocked her head at him. “Based on our evidence, we suspect he was dead before he took a trip out of your window.”

Dr. Roginsky grimaced. “Oh dear. And you believe he was…killed in my office?”

“That’s what we’re here to find out,” answered Korsak. He flicked the envelope containing the warrant into the dentist’s hand. “You’ll find this in order,” he remarked.

The dentist nodded. “Yes, thank you. I appreciate the search warrant. The nature of dentistry, as with all medicine, is confidential.” He produced a silver keyring from the pocket of his pinstriped pants and unlocked the door behind him. A cluster of anxious CSIU techs and uniformed officers poured into the room, attempting to make up for the time they’d lost to the warrant. “I wanted to ensure the sanctity of my patients’ care while still aiding your investigation.”

“We have likely lost a significant amount of trace evidence during this time, especially since the room was open to the air,” chided Maura.

He shook his head and leaned towards her. “That concern has been mollified, Dr. Isles. I mean, Maura.” He gestured to the short young man behind him. “When Gregory came in to work yesterday, he noticed the broken window. We arranged for a temporary shield to be put in place to protect the office from the elements until we could replace the glass.”

“And you didn’t notice anything awry? Like, I don’t know, a huge pool of blood?” He was far too comfortable answering her questions. Only the truly guilty psychopaths were this smooth when she was this agitated.
“I was not in the office yesterday. Monday is Dr. Nader’s day off, so I was at our office in Springfield. Gregory did not report anything besides the broken window.” Dr. Roginsky turned his emerald gaze towards his secretary. “I trust him implicitly.”

“If you’ll excuse me,” said Maura, “I’m going to conduct my forensic investigation. Jane?” She turned expectantly towards the detective, who found herself no longer distracted by the gorgeous man. The moment she caught Maura’s eye, all her attraction and attention went towards the beautiful woman.

“Right behind you.”

“Dr. Roginsky, I have one or two more questions if you don’t mind,” stated Korsak.

“Whatever you need, detective.”

Jane left the two men behind her and followed the petite doctor into the office. She remembered her childhood dentist, whose office smelled like grinding metal and whose décor was plucked right out of the 1950’s. This room was the precise opposite. If not for a dentist’s chair and a movable lamp tucked on the ceiling, the office could easily function as the entrance to some grand cathedral. White marble tiling stretched from wall to wall with tasteful and spare shelving nestled in the corners. The Boston skyline set against a red dawn spread out in front of the floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows. After gawking at the view for a moment, Jane turned to find Maura standing there, her valise on the floor, and her arms crossed in frustration.

Maura sniffed the air and wrinkled her nose. Jane gamely did the same and detected nothing.

“Do you…smell something…” prodded Jane.

“Sodium hypochlorite in minute amounts. Too little for the average, untrained nose to detect,” she replied. Jane shrugged off the casual insult as Maura continued. “But present nonetheless. Someone has bleached this entire room.”

Jane looked around. “Yeah, but Maura, this is a dentist’s office. Wouldn’t you expect bleach?”

“Actually, no,” came the reply from behind them. Arnold strolled in, his beautiful face troubled. “All of the offices under the Sustainable Solutions banner, including mine, have committed themselves to eco-friendly, minimally destructive practices. We use an alternative cleaning solution, combined with UV radiation, to sterilize our rooms.”

Jane nodded her head. “Okay, so, maybe whoever killed our guy cleaned up after himself?”

Maura grimaced. “That would be conjecture, Detective Rizzoli.”

“Or maybe there was a fire and someone decided to put it out with bleach,” Jane scowled. She turned back to the dentist, who had taken a step or two forward to inspect his office. “So, Arnold. Where’s this broken window?”

“Right this way, detective.” He spun on a polished shoe, shifted aside one of the shelving units and slid open a paneled door. They stepped into a crowded space, with piles of tools, stacks of lumber, and a string of worklights dangling from the ceiling. The window was covered with a layer of plywood held in place by duct tape and garbage bags. The wind whistled menacingly outside, reminding Jane that a half inch of compressed wood shavings was all that stood between her and a long, uncomfortable descent to the pavement below.

“We’re expanding into another office,” he explained. “Gregory came in to see if the contractors had
started and discovered the missing window.” At the mention of his name, the scowling assistant came to stand beside his boss.

Jane took a step forward, then reached up and adjusted one of the work lamps. The crime scene had been irrevocably contaminated by the contractors. Any sort of trace evidence, from shoe prints to fibers, had been obliterated over the past few hours.


The assistant snorted. “No, Detective Rizzoli, I did not notice a giant bloodstain or a dead body. I also didn’t notice any broken glass. I spent fewer than 30 seconds in this room once I saw the gaping hole in the wall. At that point, I retreated and called our handyman. He did not arrive, obviously.”

Jane let the light dangle down and watched with entertainment as one of the other officers had to duck to keep it from hitting him in the head. “Do you remember anything being out of place? Any tools missing? Was there any furniture in here?”

Gregory shrugged, palms up. “I wasn’t privy to the exact nature of the construction. My interaction with the contractors was limited to scheduling and occasional lunch orders. Nothing looked out of place other than the missing window.”

Jane walked over to the window and looked at the duct-taped edges. “Who came in to fix the windows? Contractors, right?”

“Yes. Once I could not get a hold of Mister Lauren, I told the contractors to come in earlier so they could cover the hole.”

“What time was that,” queried Jane.

“7:15 AM,” replied Gregory snappily. “Monday is the day of the week I use to refresh the office. It also allows the contractors to work without disturbing the patients. We prefer our patients have a more calming dental experience that does not include the sounds of construction.

“What were you doing for those 45 minutes? And did you hear about the dead guy they found on the pavement? Did you maybe put two and two together…”

“I believe if you want to question Gregory’s involvement in this matter, Detective Rizzoli, it would be better for you to launch an official inquiry.” The dentist gave a glittering, perfect smile. “And if that is the case, I would prefer for Gregory to have a lawyer present. After all, with such a sensitive matter you would not want any sort of misunderstanding born from confusion.”

Jane rolled her eyes covertly and nodded her head. “We’ll do that. Don’t leave the state,” she said snidely. “Meanwhile, we need to get some techs in here and hope that there’s some evidence left over from the crime scene.”

She stepped away from the dentist’s observation that without an arrest, Gregory was free to do whatever he wanted. Personally, she kind of hoped he would end up going out the window. She wondered of merely being annoying were enough to implicate him in the crime. Smug son of a…

Maura was standing in the middle of the pristine office, glaring out of the office into the skyline. She was wearing gloves but other than that, she had not moved from where Jane left her. The detective sidled up to her best friend and peered over her shoulder. “I didn’t know we were expecting to find evidence overlooking Fenway Park. You think having a nice view…”
“There’s nothing here,” Maura said flatly. “The techs are scouring every surface with luminol but someone very effectively removed any traces of bodily fluids. Even the ceiling is spotless. There is no way to tell if a crime was committed here. Heck, here’s no way to tell if dental work happened here.” Her voice pitched upward with a rare show of professional frustration.

“You’d think a white room would show more blood,” Jane observed. “And did you just say heck?”

“Well, when I designed this room, I had two things in mind: a soothing experience for the patient and an easy to clean, sterile environment in which to work.” The dentist approached and stood on Maura’s other side.

“Yeah, soothing. That’s the word I associate with the dentist. Right up there with horrifying, torturous…”

The dentist’s smile was patient, almost condescending. “Yes, that is the unfortunate stereotype dental work has gained among the public. This unfortunately leads people to neglect their dental care, causing long-term problems not only in oral hygiene but also potential damage to the jaw and heart. As a result, my partner and I have endeavored to create a more holistic dental experience.” He gestured broadly. “An open space with fewer instruments makes it feel a bit less like a medieval dungeon, yes?”

“Speaking of which, where is all the equipment,” interrupted Jane. “You know, the drills, the stabbing thing, the mirror thing, the big orange light that kind of looks like a catcher’s mask…”

By way of answer, the dentist walked over the wall and tapped on what appeared to be a hidden console. The cabinet in front of him unfolded and whirring filled the air. Jane glanced up to see the medical lamp descending from a panel in the ceiling while the cabinet displayed row after row of gleaming tools within.

He went towards a tool and Jane almost tackled him away, ushering over a crime scene tech to oversee the removal of the equipment tray. Shaking his head, the dentist explained to Jane, “In many cases, the tools themselves cause more distress than the procedure. I prefer to store the equipment out of sight and to distract the patient while I engage in the final sterilization and preparation procedures.”

“Distraction? What? Like three big-screen TVs showing the Red Sox winning the World Series?”

“Or a picture-perfect, outrageously handsome dentist,” all but whispered Maura. Jane didn’t have it in her to be jealous at that moment because she was honestly thinking the same thing. Then again, weren’t they both…this wasn’t the time to worry about it.

He indicated the cabinet and another tech walked over, took a few pictures, and opened a solid metal container. The tech took what looked like a set of massive binoculars with a pair of earbuds and carefully wrapped them in a plastic bag, then walked them over to where the dentist and detective were standing.

Maura immediately sprung to life. “Oh! This is a prototypical virtual-reality device. I was given the opportunity to beta test one for the company,” she indicated it then indicated herself with a graceful hand. “They were thinking of creating an anatomy program to be used in medical schools but I told them under no conditions could we electronically replicate the experience of being with the cadavers.”

“Yeah. I can’t imagine who would want to miss the experience of standing in a basement smelling like formaldehyde while we root around in someone’s stomach like were looking for the prize in a
Cracker Jack box.” Jane deadpanned. She put on a pair of latex clubs and picked up the device. “You mean to tell me you work on some guy’s face while they are pretending they are…”

She swore a hint of a blush crossed the handsome man’s face. “I assure you all the programs we have available are suitable for every client who comes in. They are primarily natural retreats though some have a bit of excitement. My personal favorite is rock-climbing in the Adirondacks.”

Two doctors began active banter about their favorite nature exploits. Jane wanted to be privy to more Maura’s thoughts but there was still a crime to be solved. She walked back and forth across the room, watching the techs busy themselves with a new treasure trove of equipment to dust and bag. Her detective sense said every one of those tools would be cleaner than the day they were plopped into that container from their packages.

She looked up again. This was the best-looking drop ceiling she’d ever seen in her life. Jane could not recall one that hadn’t had a handful of water-stained tiles surrounding sputtering fluorescent lights. Instead of the usual woven industrial tiles, this one had a series of lightly patterned pieces set into the framework metal grid. Jane squinted her eyes. Something didn’t seem right.

“Korsak? Do you see what I see?”

Korsak sauntered over and crinkled his face in the same way as hers. Then, he leaned on Jane. “I see a bunch of tiles circling to the left and I see a bunch of swirls going to the right,” he said with a conspiratorial grin.

“I don’t understand what you’re saying, Jane,” said Maura, but she obediently followed Jane’s finger as the detective pointed upwards. “Oh, I see. A subtle difference in the appearance of the tile.”

“Detective Rizzoli,” the tech shouted from the ladder. He almost tumbled to the floor in his excitement as he gestured. “I think I found something!”

The tech gingerly rotated the upper lamp on its swiveling attachment to reveal a splash of what appeared to be dried blood hidden on top of the curving yellow glass.

Jane turned to Maura in triumph. “Looks like we’ve got ourselves a crime scene, Doc.”
Jane leaned her head on the wall next to the two-way mirror in the interrogation room. “We are getting nowhere,” she moaned, sagging under her body weight before slumping into a chair.

The lawyer Dr. Roginsky hired for his secretary was almost as good looking as the dentist himself. Blond hair, lightly tanned skin, a suit that cost more than her car, and of course, perfect teeth. The perpetual slime that all defense attorneys emitted knocked his attractiveness down a few notches but staring at eye candy made her feel nominally better about the time they were wasting.

Korsak had laid into Gregory with all of his Boston detective might but the lawyer had played hardball in return. Insinuating questions and incitements were turned aside by the lawyer, who repeatedly instructed his client not to answer. Unlike almost every other perp Jane had seen, the mousy secretary listened to his council and failed to blurt out some accidental confession. As a result, two hours of questioning got them no closer to an answer than the quick exchange they had at the Pru. Her other preferred suspect, the good doctor himself, indicated that EZ-Pass records and witness statements would put him firmly out of Boston at the time of the murder. The uniforms were still sorting through the data but her cop’s gut told her he would come back clean.

Jane left interrogation and wandered back to her office. A box of stale donuts sat half-open on her desk and she flipped the lid up inquisitively. Half a jelly donut, its contents spilling out like blood spatter, and a third of a plain whole wheat were all that remained. She grimaced and closed the box. Maybe she could send Frost for another dozen. Or two. Or five. She could eat a handful more now that she didn’t have anyone to worry about her figure.

That dinner with Maura could have gone worse if, for example, Maura had decided to splash a glass of red wine in her face and stormed out Italian soap opera style. Sure, they’d talked. Maura told Jane she loved her, then explained how that love wasn’t something she could pursue because Jane was too good of a cop to respect the needs of her loved ones. Jane tilted her head back and stifled a scream. She would do anything for Maura, right? Did that mean quitting the police force and ending up behind a desk so Maura wouldn’t worry? Remembering those weeks she’d been on ice after her injury, Jane realized she’d rather be shot again.

“Good afternoon, Jane,” said Maura cheerily. Jane startled back, tipping the chair and almost falling to the floor as it skidded out from under her. She flailed her limbs and knocked the donut box away, then gripped the edges of her desk, flipped her hair back, looked up towards her friend, and forced a smile.

“Hello, Maura. How are you?”

“Fine,” she replied, her smile unknowable. “Preliminary testing on the blood found above the lamp is the same blood type as the victim. That does not narrow down our search significantly, but I thought you should know.”

“Yeah, thanks. I appreciate it. Hey, anything on the tiles or the equipment?”

Maura shook her head. “The tiles appear to be standard gypsum composite. Nothing remarkable to our eyes.”

“I figured,” shrugged Jane. “Add it to the list of things that aren’t getting us anywhere. The building’s security videotapes were ‘mysteriously’ deleted against protocol. We’re working on the outdoor security videos for nearby buildings but that will take time. Gregory provided us with the
name of the tile manufacturer but they’re not willing to give up their records without a warrant. We’ve tried questioning everyone else on the floor, including the contractors, but everyone is exercising their damn right to stay silent.”

“The Constitution applies to the guilty and the innocent, Jane,” chided Maura. “Due process is a fundamental principle of our legal system. Skipping a step in the name of expedience will irrevocably taint the investigation. We know where such shortcuts can lead. Look at that pharmacist in Woburn.”

Jane winced. “Maura, that pharmacist did more than take a few shortcuts. She outright fabricated evidence. You know I’d never do that, right?”

Maura’s nod was conciliatory. “Of course not, but Jane, it comes from the same impetus. The desire for immediate administration of justice must always be tempered with respect for the legal system.”

Jane flopped in a sprawl back on her chair, hooking a knee against her desk to keep from upsetting herself onto the floor. “I really wish I weren’t getting a history lesson on my own job, Maura.”

“Then you should keep the tenets of the criminal justice system in mind whenever we have these conversations,” she said in a tone that concluded the discussion.

Maura’s phone had dinged a few times during their conversation and she finally fished it out of her pocketbook. A few taps later, she grimaced, rolled her eyes, and began furiously drilling the keyboard with agitated thumbs. Then she paused, held down what was likely the delete key, and shoved it back into her bag. She looked up into Jane’s baffled face.

“William,” she said with a derisive wave. “He is suggesting we get together tonight so I can give him a tour of my lab. He believes he can provide superior insight. This is the third time he has made this or a similar suggestion.”

“Really,” Jane said, in a disbelieving tone. “I hope you’ve told him that he can cram his superior insight into his inferior rectum.” She omitted the sentiment where she would prefer to do the cramming herself.

Maura fidgeted with the hem of her skirt. “The first time I politely demurred. The second time I did so…less politely…and he reacted with a barrage of insults.” She brought her eyes up to meet Jane’s. “Now I realize this is a man who will fail at respecting my space, so I will do the opposite of engaging him.”

“Good. Ignore him. I’m sure that will piss him off more. I mean, what kind of moron thinks insulting a woman will lead to-” Jane settled down at Maura’s hurt expression. He had managed to pull Maura into bed, after all, and maligning his intelligence would be indirectly harming Maura. As much as she wanted to plan a satisfactory revenge on this man, she needed to focus on the case.

“Back to the tiles: I didn’t see any boxes in that storage room, so whomever replaced the ceiling must have known the building well enough to grab a different set. Someone on staff, probably.” She ticked another finger. “The cop in me says throwing the body out the window wasn’t part of the plan. Why spend all that time scrubbing down the murder scene only to let the entire city of Boston know they killed a guy?”

Maura drummed her fingers on the table. “The criminal mind rarely works in such a linear or even non-linear form but I would agree it seems unusual. I will ask Susie to produce a few simulations to see whether the body was accelerated horizontally prior to its descent.”

“As opposed to…just falling out of the window,” Jane blinked a few times. She spun out of her chair
and kicked it over in victory, then bent out the door.

“Hey, Frankie,” she called down the hall. Her brother’s brown hair popped out from behind a stack of cabinets.

“Yeah,” he responded.

“Remember that time you were playing ball at Uncle Roberto’s house and broke the window?”

“No, I remember the time I fell out of a window while holding a football and minding my own business.” He gestured with a finger towards his back. “Fifteen stitches and I was grounded for a month.”

“This may be your chance to vindicate yourself. Do a little searching on that contracting company and the equipment they were using. I want to know if it’s possible to pop a window out of a skyscraper mid-renovation.” Jane couldn’t resist adding, “And maybe this will convince Ma to give you back the allowance money she confiscated.”

“Two hundred dollars to repair the damn thing,” he replied. She didn’t hear the rest of his rant because she had already disappeared back into the office with Maura. Her friend looked inquisitively towards her.

“Jane, I seriously doubt the construction materials used in a Boston skyscraper would be similar to those used in an 1880’s Italiante-style apartment in Revere,” she said with an arched eyebrow. “Though I am curious about how one falls out of a window while minding his business.” She made air quotes with her slender fingers.

“When minding your business means juggling a football and showing off for Cousin Ellie and her three best friends,” retorted Jane. She stood next to Maura and enjoyed a few seconds of forbidden closeness before shaking her head. “This is a waste. Come on. Let’s see if the boys have found anything.”

“Oh, Jane, before I forget.” Maura’s hand was on her shoulder. A line of goosebumps started at the base of Jane’s spine and rushed up her body at the unexpected touch. “I have the leftovers at the house. If you’d like to come by to pick them up, I’ll be there tonight.” Maura wouldn’t look her in the eye and Jane melted inside. Sweet and transparent, still wanting to spend time together without leading Jane on. Typical Maura.

“Sure. I love watching raw meat explode in the microwave.” A flash of ire in Maura’s green-grey eyes was all her friend could manage as a retort before she had to all but chase Jane out into the main office.

Frost waved a handful of papers at the waiting detectives and primly perched medical examiner. His compact frame vibrated with his usual intensity as he strode forward, tossed down the records, and pointed.

“Got the results of our preliminary investigation back. Get this: his name actually IS Ralph Lauren. Ralph Antonio Lauren. He was born here in Boston, raised in Southie, and was a carpenter until two years ago.”

“Did he decide to pursue the vocation of his namesake,” suggested Korsak helpfully. “Start a line of casual menswear for the working slob?”
The dark-skinned detective aimed a brutal eye at his partner, who faux-shrank into his chair.

“No, Detective Korsak. He did not,” replied Frost with a bit of similarly false venom. “He got into some sort of labor dispute at a construction site in Cambridge. He not only got banned from the site. He got thrown out of the union altogether.”

Frankie let out a whistle. “Damn. I know guys in jail for felony assault who have a job waiting for them once they get out. He must have really screwed up.”

Frost nodded. “Embezzlement, to the tune of nearly $250,000 in three years.”

Now it was Jane’s turn to look shocked. Maura watched the Jane with furtive enjoyment. Maura might criticize Jane for being emotional or temperamental, but the option of a vibrant, expressive friend in her life and, well, maybe in her bed was something the reserved scientist had come to enjoy.

“A quarter of a million dollars? Christ, how does a carpenter even run into that much money? And why wasn’t it on the news? I remember two days of local coverage when that secretary stole 20K from the Revere PTA.”

Frost shrugged and plopped himself down on his chair, spinning once before putting his feet up.

“He worked supply. Fudged the numbers here and there, lied about the price, hustled a lot of construction materials to people who wanted high-quality stuff but didn't want to pay high-quality prices. As for why we never heard of it, the foreman I talked to said Ralph had enough good history that they decided to let him go quietly. Plus, and this was apparently just between me and his labor rep, Ralph had some problems before that and wasn’t himself.”

“Statistically, people under duress are more likely to commit acts of questionable morality, especially if they can justify those actions. It’s called transference,” added Maura helpfully. Then she paused. This was extremely similar to the logic she had used with Jane during their night together. The other woman clearly picked up on it but didn’t respond. She just threw a half-smile Maura’s way.

“Yeah, well, can I claim moral transference or whatever the day I decide to gather my pension in a lump sum from someone else’s bank account,” quipped Korsak. His face went more thoughtful as he leafed through the paperwork. “You’d expect to see some sign of that money, but this says he’s living in a slum. Bank is overdrawn, credit cards are maxed. No car…”

“Perhaps he was stealing money to put towards a loved one in need,” suggested Maura. “There are numerous cases of men undertaking acts of thievery to support their families, both in literature and in modern parlance.”

“No such luck, Dr. Isles,” replied Frost. “From what I can tell, this guy had a serious gambling problem. I counted receipts from off-track betting, lotteries, the casino down in Rhode Island, you name it.”

“And where there is a guy in debt, there is usually a loan shark willing to take advantage of them,” said Jane, sitting up in her chair with a grin on her face.

“So where does a guy from Southie go when his bad habits catch up with him?” The three detectives exchanged a meaningful look and Korsak picked up a phone.

“Lemme make a few calls. I know just the guy.”
The overweight bookie in front of Jane drummed his nicotine stained fingers on the table while eyeing her through bloodshot, pale blue eyes. She glared back and restrained the urge to throw something at his head. The two of them had been sitting like this for the better part of ten minutes ever since his lawyer had muscled in and told his client to stop talking.

This lawyer was not a dashingly handsome Harvard boy. He looked like a bus driver who had stolen a briefcase and sauntered into the station unannounced. Well known to Jane, he smirked at her as he settled in beside his client.

“Detective Rizoliiii,” said the lawyer in a sing-song voice. “I thought you’d know by now not to start questioning a suspect without his constitutional right to legal representation. It’s as if you want Mr. Conroy to accidentally incriminate himself.”

“Mr. Bryaannnnnt,” whined Jane in reply. “Your client is not a suspect in our case, which means he doesn’t need legal representation. This is an informal discussion.”

“Then why was he hustled out of his lunchtime activities by several of Boston’s finest.” The term was sneered by Bryant. “Who I will note used force well out of proportion for a voluntary visit.”

“I’ll tell their CO to keep them inside at recess,” said Jane, waggling her head back and forth. “I greatly appreciate your willingness to assist the Boston Police Department,” she said slowly, enunciating each word with as much polite sarcasm as she could muster on this little sleep. "Now would you please answer the goddamn question?"

"And which one with that, Detective Rizzoli? You've asked so many in the last half-hour before I arrived." Bryant spread his fingers, three oversize gold rings reflecting the fluorescent light onto the table and walls.

"I need to know whether you have had any dealings with a gentleman named Ralph Lauren," she said, restraining the urge to take both men by the scruffs of their unshaven and oily necks and slam their heads into the table a few times. The tradeoff between stress relief and a police brutality charge was just even enough to make it a bad idea by a razor thin margin.

The plump men in front of her exchanged a beady-eyed look.

“Ralph Lauren. The underwear guy,” replied Conroy with some confusion.

“Don’t be cute.” snapped Jane. “No, not the underwear guy. The ex-carpenter with a gambling problem who probably came to your doorstep desperate for money. The guy I think you worked over before he ended up thrown out a window.”

“Oooohhhhh,” said Conroy, nodding his head and compressing his two double chins into a single roll of fat. “Big Rollo. Yeah, I’ve met him a few times. A businessman such as myself makes it a point to familiarize…myself…with my many neighbors.” Conroy attempted to do a Southie version of a young Marlon Brando in the Godfather. He ended up sounding like an old Marlon Brando on a bender. “As such, this Mr. Lauren would have made my acquaintance.”

“You’re not the mayor, Conroy. You don’t do door-to-door meet and greets,” Jane growled. “I doubt you showed up at his house one day to have a friendly chat and maybe sell him some Girl Scout cookies.”

"Temper, temper. Detective Rizzoli. This kind of attitude is not likely to elicit the cooperation you so desperately need." Bryant waggled one of his sausage-sized digits in front of her face close enough for her to catch a whiff of old tomato sauce.
Detective Rizzoli placed her hands on her knees and dug her fingernails into her palms. She attempted to switch tactics. "I am sure you can understand my position, Mr. Conroy. We have a dead man and very few leads other than his probable interactions with you."

"And what makes you think he came to me? Insinuations about the nature of my business are not appreciated," he chuckled.

"I have approximately zero interest in 'the nature of your business', Conroy. Bottom-feeders like you are a dime a dozen. But you may be the only key we have to figuring out who murdered this guy and right now, you’re looking pretty damn good."


"I don’t need proof," she sneered. God, she loved this part. "I can scrape together something that will hold you for 24 hours while I do an exhaustive search of your property and records to see the who’s, what’s, and when’ of your clients.” Jane narrowed her eyes. “How many people will do business with you after they think you turned your records over to the cops?"

"And if I cooperate," he asked nervously. His lawyer tried to slow him down, but the bookie batted his hand away.

"Then you stroll out of here and go back to getting day drunk on cheap beer while ripping off your neighbors.” Jane made a wide gesture towards the barred window behind them.

The two men looked at each other and the lawyer gave a noncommittal shrug. Conroy nodded and stared off at the ceiling somewhere. “Rollo had a problem. A big one. Never met a game he couldn’t bet on and never knew when to stop.”

“The kind of guy that makes sure you’ll always be in business, right?”

“That only works, Detective Rizzoli, if they pay me back. I’m not running a charity,” he replied with a wry smirk. “I’ll front someone a line of credit, sure, but if they don’t make good, I don’t make money. I don’t like not making money.” The man twisted his face into something more somber. “In this case, Rollo was down 25 grand and was two months late. I had heard enough of his promises. I let him know of my displeasure at his reneging on our reasonable financial deal. Let’s say there were some…consequences to his inaction.”

“Yeah, like a good ol’ Southie beatdown,” replied Jane, rolling her eyes.

“Detective Rizzoli,” interrupted the rotund and perspiring lawyer. “This line of questioning might lead to my client incriminating himself for a crime as yet unspo—"

“Nah, lemme finish Phil,” said Conroy with a wave of one plump hand. He apparently lacked the sense of their prior guest, Gregory. The lawyer, well-practiced with this particular client, made no attempts to keep his client from accidentally confessing to a crime. “He stopped by the bar about a week ago to ask for some more time. I thought I’d given him enough. We had a disagreement and settled it like men.”

“I didn’t realize men settled things by holding each other down and kicking the crap out of each other but maybe I just grew up with more class.”

“I will ignore that racial slur,” said Conroy with an insulted tone. Jane rolled her eyes again. “I found this admission on his part quite unusual as I had put him in touch with a certain individual who had been in touch with me.”
Jane’s ears perked up. “A certain individual?”

“A few months ago a guy in a three thousand dollar suit rolled into the bar, sat down, and offered me a deal. He said he knew the nature of my business and the, ah, variability of my clientele. As a businessman himself, he explained he had several well-paying jobs that only the most desperate would be willing to take. If I ever had clients who were having trouble paying me back, I would refer them to him. He, in return, would ensure the cash was paid directly to me.”

“You took the deal? Sounds like a set-up.”

“I thought so too,” he replied. “But I gave it shot. Sure enough, he made good. Send a guy over and a few weeks later my bank account is full.” He grinned. “When Rollo got in his hole, I did the same for him. Sent him off…”

“I hear a but.”

“But he showed up last week saying he needed some more time. I didn’t like the answer, so I gave him…a reminder. Four days ago, he showed up with five thousand dollars. Cash.” He slipped his hands over one another. “Rollo said he’d have the rest real soon and so…I let him walk.”

Jane exhaled. “Do you have any contact information for this middle-man? A phone number? An email? A post-it note?”

“There’s a number I call when I have a potential client,” shrugged Conroy. “I don’t talk to him directly – he could be dead for all care. All I know is I dial the number and my problems disappear.”

Jane leaned across the table, coming as close as she dared to this sad pile of a man. “Set up a meeting.”

He snorted a laugh. “Are you out of your mind? If he thinks I double-crossed him, what he could do to me will make what I do to other guys look like a love tap.” He crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair. “No deal, Detective Rizzoli. I’ve told you what you needed to know. So I’ll be going.”

He stood, his paunch pushing the table away from them. His lawyer followed, which did not keep Jane from grabbing Mr. Conroy and slapping on a pair of handcuffs.

“What’s meaning of this,” demanded the lawyer. “You said he was here not as a suspect.”

“Well, he just admitted to usury, felony assault, and possibly aiding drug trafficking. Think that’s enough to get us started.” She pulled the cuffs a little tighter and jerked the fat man back. “Alternatively, you call your guy tonight to set up a meeting. If this is legit, you get to go home. If it’s not, well, you can kiss your whiskey goodbye.”

“This is extortion,” said the lawyer angrily. “You’re out of line. This is illegal.”

“No, extortion is when you break a guy’s fingers and punch out his teeth because he is late paying you back. This is justice.” She shoved him forward. "What'll it be, Mr. Conroy?"

The loan shark slumped in his bonds. "All right. I'll get him on the line."

“Good plan. And when you’re ready, we’ll be ready.” She pushed him back into the chair and stormed out of the office. Korsak and Frost were waiting with shared smiles.

"It’s nice watching you work, Jane," said Frost. "Almost textbook. They need to teach this in the academy."
"I'll make a YouTube video. Shaking down idiots 101," she said with a mirthless chuckle.

"We even have the perfect guy to act as bait." Frost crowed. He pointed at Korsak, who gave a curtsey.

"I am what I am," said Korsak as the three detectives walked back to the central office. Maura looked up from her phone and tracked them with an expectant grin.

"Did you get your man," she said her head bobbing back and forth.

"We got our…middleman. A middleman who works for another middleman." She flopped into her chair. "Turns out this loan shark has a deal with persons unknown for extremely delinquent clients. Guys willing to do almost anything to settle a debt."

On Maura tapped her long fingernails on the desk. Jane watch them and pushed the memory of what they could do from her tired consciousness.

"Desperate men often engage in desperate behaviors, which would fit with Mr. Lauren’s surgery," she observed, rocking back and forth. "However, most mules bring illegal substances into the country. There is nothing illegal about osmium."

"Maybe it's to avoid tariffs," suggested Korsak. "There's gotta be some hefty tax on osmium."

"Actually, Detective Korsak, it is free to import osmium in the United States. It is considered an alloy of platinum, though that does not make any sense. Platinum and osmium are distinct elements although they are both transition metals. Nevertheless, according to the uniform tariff act-"

"Maura, how do you even know this," boggled Jane. "I didn't know you were an importer or exporter of precious metals in your spare time."

"When you do as much dealing in fine art as I do, Jane, you become infinitely and intimately familiar with the vagaries of US customs. There are some less scrupulous jewelers who attempt to decrease the price of importing materials from other countries by claiming they are using platinum. I remind them that I am part of the Boston Police Force and have a best friend who would, um," Maura blushed and faltered.

"Beat the crap out of them with a hand-carved jade statue," suggested Frost, elbowing the rotund detective next to him.

"Oo, I know," said Korsak, perking up, "take a gold-encrusted necklace and make them try to eat it?"

Maura looked relieved at their ribbing and Jane swallowed the fear she had collected in the back of her throat. She felt safe enough in Maura’s confidence and the boys’ distraction to banter back to them.

"Or I could just arrest them and turn them over to the FBI. It doesn’t have to be all about old time violence," she groaned.

"Regardless, we can ask all our questions once we set up the bust," said Frost. "We do this right, we get this taken care of before dinner tomorrow."

"Unless all we get is the runaround from some ass who's trying to save his own ass" remarked Jane. "Telling the cops, 'It's not me. It’s some other guy,' is a pretty time-honored way getting out of responsibility." She held up her hands against her partners coming objection. "But it's the only lead
we have. So, let’s chase it.”

Without thinking, she reached over and tugged Maura’s arm, pulling her companion out of the office. “I want to head back to the Pru. Poke around, see if I can dig something up.”

Maura gave unexpected resistance and Jane turned back to see a confused, conflicted face settle itself into something smoother. “I’m not sure how much help I can be…but I am certain we’ll find something to do with me while I’m there.”

Jane forced a smile. “I bet we can.”

Jane had taken to stalking in and out of every room on the fifth floor of the Prudential Center, all but abandoning Maura in the middle of the office suite. At first Maura had entertained herself by scrutinizing the many awards that were strategically arranged around the sitting area. As she examined yet another award for ‘eco-friendly manufacturing’ and ‘outstanding achievement in recycling’, she wondered when awards went from tasteful hardwood plaques to angular pieces of garishly engraved acrylic. She made this known to the admin at the front desk.

“It is ironic that accolades for environmentally responsible business practices are created using materials known to be toxic to the environment and workers. It would be more appropriate for these to be made from reclaimed aluminum deemed unsuitable for recycling.”

The young woman behind the desk gave her a withering look. “I will be sure to inform the Boston Chamber of Commerce that their choice of award material is environmentally irresponsible.”

Maura beamed. “Excellent. I have their number in my speed dial if you cannot find it on their website.”

She returned to her perusal, which lasted only a few more minutes before she changed the topic of study to the décor. Her attempt to investigate the framed panorama of Wat Arun was interrupted by a peeved, dark-skinned woman with a green mohawk informing her that the area in front of her office was confidential. She icily guided Maura back to the sitting area before clicking the door behind her.

Maura let out a sigh of consternation and pulled out her phone. She deleted yet another irate string of insults and self-invitations to her lab from William, at which point she finally blocked him. Her anticipation of self-realization on the part of that man was never fulfilled. This act marked the last interaction the two of them would ever have, a flick of technology shutting off his access to her forever.

Texting her lab revealed no additional information from the evidence, Her automatic next thought was to text Jane, which made her smile self-consciously. Jane’s aggravated voice scolding Maura for interrupting her would be a welcome addition. She’d been trying to get Jane to pay attention to her all day but Jane had been so wrapped up in the case they barely had time to speak.

Maura supposed that was good. She wanted Jane fulfilled and happy, which solving a case would do, though Jane would be happier if there were leads to chase instead of blind searching. Maura debated fabricating evidence just to give Jane something to chew on but decided against it. Professional ethics notwithstanding, Jane would see through her in an instant.

What would a life with Jane resemble, Maura wondered, thumbing through her phone to appear busy. Moving in together was a logical and simple step given how often they were together anyway. A wedding perhaps? Children? Then again, Maura needed to confirm this was not a single statistical
point outside of Jane’s heterosexuality that would never be revisited. When she talked to Jane tonight, she would inquire further about Jane’s sexuality.

“Dr. Isles?” A warm and tightly enunciated voice disrupted Maura’s foray into fantasy. She made eye contact with perfectly carved features of Dr. Roginsky, owner of the scene of the crime and potential murder suspect. His attractiveness generated an involuntary welcoming smile even as his association with the case made her suspicious.

“Dr. Roginsky,” she said. Her normal greeting was overtaken by her professional training. “We shouldn’t be talking. You’re one of our prime suspects.”

“I understand. I nonetheless wished to speak to you. I am aware everything we speak about will be used to further your case. Indeed, I welcome such input.”

If Jane were here, she would be able to discern this man’s true motives. A few clever comebacks later, she would have squelched his charms and shot through to his hidden rationale. Maura’s skills lay elsewhere and she lacked the ability to dodge the conversation. Her attempt at deflecting him failed and he settled into the chair next to her.

“It is unusual a suspect would seek out one of the investigators of the case when he has not been cleared.”

He angled his body towards her in an obvious display of establishing connection. “Unlike others you have encountered, I am eager to seek a resolution and wish to aid in any way I can. You see, although the loss of life is immensely regrettable, I view this entire tragic episode as…well, the Yiddish term would be a mitzvah.”

Maura looked at him with a nervously mollifying smile. “Maybe I am misunderstanding you. This incident is a blessing?”

“No,” he exclaimed, clapping his hands together. “Oh Maura, I am so glad to find a brilliant, kindred spirit. I was so worried I wouldn’t meet anyone who understood. Our entire purpose in expanding Sustainable Solutions was to create greater harmony with the rta. I realize now that focusing on just the dentistry and not the other medical facets was selfish. I have lost much in this lesson but it is not too late.”

Maura wished Jane were here to create a more violently incredulous retort. Her own response seemed inadequate. “You’re saying the murder of a handyman in your dental practice is karmic retribution for overstepping your place in the natural order of the universe?”

“Yes,” he exclaimed, clapping his hands together. “Oh Maura, I am so glad to find a brilliant, kindred spirit. I was so worried I wouldn’t meet anyone who understood. Our entire purpose in expanding Sustainable Solutions was to create greater harmony with the rta. I realize now that focusing on just the dentistry and not the other medical facets was selfish. I have lost much in this lesson but it is not too late.”

“Other medical facets,” she asked, trying to direct the conversation back from the land of the religiously absurd.

“Yes, we have many other vendors who want to transform medicine to be friendlier to the environment and the soul. Think of all the waste we generate during a surgery. Think of the poisons we unleash during manufacturing of chemotherapy. What if we could find a way to do the same things better and cleaner?”
Maura nodded along, inching back from the doctor to avoid his next rapturous outburst. “That would be beneficial and cost effective, I agree. You feel you were taking away from those other opportunities by focusing on your business?”

He looked abashed. “I have been more financially successful than many of the other endeavors, yes. Holistic dentistry has a vast consumer base and my earnings have been, quite honestly, exceptional. The other teams are pursuing more niche fields and lack the capital to expand as quickly. I should have seen beyond my immediate sphere and given them a stronger financial base.”

The brassy stir of Jane finishing aggravating her targets was all the opportunity Dr. Roginsky needed to make his exit. “Dr. Isles, Maura. Please, once you have cleared me of my involvement – and I assure you this will happen soon – I would love to have dinner. It is rare I am able to discuss my philosophy and science with one as brilliant and, if I may be a little indecorous, beautiful as you.”

He produced a business card and pressed it into Maura’s hand. Jane’s approach sent him scurrying in the other direction before Maura could reply.

“Maura, what was that guy doing here,” she said, gesturing after the retreating dentist.

“Explaining to me that he thinks he is being karmically punished for being selfish in his business dealings. Had he been more generous, Mr. Lauren would still be alive.” Jane’s incredulity was as gratifying in person as Maura had imagined.

“I cannot begin to imagine the mental gymnastics required to leap from ‘spend less on decorations’ to ‘guy gets murdered’, but this entire case is insane.” She tugged the dentist’s gold-embossed business card from between Maura’s delicate fingers and flipped it over. Across the back was a perfect script containing the handsome man’s cell phone and private email.

“And…you’re going on a date with him?”

The doctor snatched it back and placed it into the recesses of her purse. “Have more faith in me, Jane. I see this as an opportunity to gather information in an informal setting. I have seen people become freer and less guarded when in a casual setting.” The two began to depart the office and Maura snorted in derision. “Plus, there’s only so much misappropriation of Hinduism and Buddhism I can take in a single setting without wanting to get out my copy of the Vedas and beat him with it.”

“I dunno Maura,” said Jane with a teasing smile. “He might enjoy it.”

They began walking towards the elevator. “Did you uncover anything?”

“Nothing earthshaking,” she grumbled. “The non-matching tiles came from a suite of offices at the other end of the row, something about an in-house manufacturing? Thing? It was all very scientific and I zoned out about two sentences in. As for our vic, most people saw him as a soft-spoken, chubby guy who was above average at repairs. No bad blood.”

Jane’s phone buzzed and she began chatting animatedly with the officer on the other end while Maura allowed herself to drift into her fantasies again. Jane would leave with her now. They would go home, eat dinner, and allow the conversation to flow freely. Eventually Jane would be convinced that Maura had erred in turning her way they would spend the rest of the evening making up. When Jane closed the phone with a hang-dog look in her phase, Maura knew that fantasy was unlikely to come to fruition.

“Listen, the guys…ugh, I don’t know why they’re so useless right now. The guys need me to help set up the bust for tomorrow morning. Something about…oh, I don’t even know. I need to go back
to the station.” She sagged against the wall of the elevator. “It’s like they know I haven’t slept well in
days.”

Maura patted her hand. “Come by afterward. I have food for you.”

Jane’s tired smile made Maura shiver. “You’re the best, you know that? I have no idea what I’d do
without…you.” Her voice trailed off and she looked away. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be!” Maura chased Jane out of the elevator. “The feeling is mutual. It always has been.”

Another grin was her reward.

Jane flopped herself face down on the guest bed, too tired to take off her clothing. God, this day had
been interminable. Tromping through crime scenes, interrogating loan sharks, pouring over financial
records and chasing evidence. All she needed was a shootout to complete the full Boston homicide
experience. Regardless of the circumstances, she was grateful for Maura’s hospitality. Driving all the
way home, putting together a meal out of years old condiments, and dealing with the chaos of her
apartment was less desirable than enjoying their high-class leftovers in a meticulously kept home.
She’d even gotten a gourmet burger out of the deal.

That said, Maura would be scandalized if she knew Jane were wearing dirty boots on her 100%
linen-covered down comforter. With a distressed grunt of effort, Jane rolled over and unzipped each
boot, tossing them one at a time at the far wall. Then she shimmied her way out of her suit until she
was left in her undershirt, bra, and panties. The last moments of her energy unhooked the bra, which
she slingshotted onto the clothing pile. Then, she crawled into the sheets and fell asleep. Or at least
tried to.

A quiet knock broke her descent into dreamland. She put her head under her pillow and tried to
pretend she didn’t hear it. It was her mother trying to remind Jane of some trivial matter that could
always wait until morning and yet somehow never did. Jane recalled the night she had seriously
considered shooting her mother after Angela had knocked no fewer than three times to remind Jane
about packing a lunch, calling a podiatrist, and picking up fresh flowers, in that order. The knock
sounded again, more insistent. Jane gave a muffled scream into the memory foam, swung herself off
the mattress, and opened up the door.

“Ma…listen,” she began, pulling her black curls from in front of her face and trying to restrain her
exhausted temper. “Can it wait for the morning?”

“Um, okay, Jane. If it needs to,” Maura replied. Her friend turned away and started back down the
hall.

Jane woke up a little more and stumble-chased after Maura. “Hey, wait, sorry. No, come in. It’s
fine.” She hesitated, took a breath, and put her hand on Maura’s satin-clad shoulder. “I figured it was
my mother. She has the knack for timing ridiculous requests just as I fall asleep.”

“I perfectly understand,” replied Maura stiffly. “It’s been a long day for us both.” She dodged the
hand but didn’t keep walking.

“Yeah, well, that doesn’t mean I can’t stay awake for a few more minutes if you need to talk.” God,
that was a dreadful lie. If Jane could, she would have laid down on the floor if it meant getting back
to sleep.
To Jane’s partial relief, Maura nodded and followed Jane back into the bedroom. Jane made triple
sure to lock the door. No use in having Angela barge in to see the two of them together. Then again,
her mother would never think twice about girls sharing the same bed. Chastely, of course. She and
Maura were not engaging in a sexual relationship ever again, Jane reminded herself sternly.

Maura positioned herself on precisely half of the bed, with not a single long blond hair crossing the
midline of the comforter. Jane lay down next to her, being careful not to touch Maura. She closed her
eyes and let the silence fall. She thought of prompting Maura to talk, but well, then Maura would be
talking and Jane wouldn’t be sleeping. As the minutes ticked by, Jane relaxed and once again, she
dangled on the precipice of sleep. Once again, it was interrupted.

“Jane, I have a request,” said Maura flatly. Jane shook her head back and forth on the pillow, then
propped herself up on one elbow to look at Maura. The other woman faced her, eyes wide and
serious. Jane groaned and flopped back again.

“How are you so damn awake at this hour? And what could I possibly give you right now that can’t
wait for the morning?” Except the obvious, Jane’s libido reminded her.

Maura sat up and crossed her arms, looking at the far wall. “This was a mistake. I’m sorry for
disturbing your sleep. I’ll go back to my room now.”

With a limp arm, Jane flailed at her friend. “Wait, Maura. Maura,” Jane almost shouted, watching her
friend get off the bed and go towards the door. “Come on, okay? I’m sorry. I’m just really tired.
What do you need?”

Maura gazed over Jane’s head towards the clothing Jane had thrown on the floor. The darker woman
cursed her own messiness. Whatever was upsetting Maura was only going to be made worse by
Jane’s inability to keep house.

“Could you…hold me? Please? Just for a bit?”

Well, that slapped Jane awake. That request, so gentle and tentative, so absolutely un-Maura-like.
Besides their dalliance, as Maura had put it, Jane could not recall Maura’s actively seeking out
physical attention without being in a state of extreme crisis. How the hell could Jane say no? But
how could Jane say yes without seeming inappropriately eager?

“Are you sure,” ventured Jane, shifting the covers around to make room for Maura. “I mean, given
all that’s happened between us…I don’t want to make you uncomfortable, I mean,” she stammered.
“Since our talk…”

“I know,” said Maura, walking back towards the bed, her expression sweet and a little enigmatic.
“I’m sure.”

Her tone went to her more typical scientific façade. “We have had an emotionally tense series of days
and I have noticed your reticence around me. In the past, you have made the attempts to reengage me
emotionally and physically after we have squabbled. Despite our productive conversation, you have
continued to be restrained in your affection. This is my way of reassuring you that we are back to
normal.”

Jane dropped her expression to grumpy incredulity. “And you had to wait until 1AM to do it?
Wouldn’t a quick hug and a pat on the ass be sufficient?”

“I am choosing to ignore the crassness of that comment,” replied Maura firmly. She slid into position,
lay on her side, and glanced over her shoulder expectantly, fluttering her eyelids a tad. “Well?”
The detective could not believe Maura was bossing her into cuddling. Then again, this was Maura’s way of pretending she didn’t have needs, especially when those needs made her vulnerable in any way.

“I am not going to argue with you because it’s too damn late and I worry I’m going to say something we’ll both regret,” groaned Jane, shifting behind Maura and flopping an arm over her side in a passable excuse for physical affection.

“That’s likely,” agreed Maura. Before Jane could give an offended retort, Maura sighed in what could only be contentment and pushed herself closer to Jane. All her muscles relaxed as she brought up a hand and intertwined it with Jane’s, clasping them together into the middle of her chest. Another happy sound removed any consternation from Jane’s mind.

Jane nestled her face into Maura’s hair, enjoying the fruity, subtle scent of her shampoo and trying to distract herself from the enticing sensation of Maura’s body curving into her own. Even with clothing on, Jane could feel Maura’s heat and the softness of her skin where their arms touched. Jane’s body began responding to the constant stimulation and Jane was instantly grateful for her female sex. Had she been male, well, the outwards signs would have been absolutely undeniable and completely unacceptable given the circumstances. Jane vowed to never force a guy to cuddle ever again if this was the hell he went through.

She thought back to all the speeches nuns had given to young men on maintaining abstinence during the tumultuous development of adolescence. Picturing the disappointment of the Virgin Mary didn’t work since Jane had long since given up the bulk of her Catholic faith. Imagining her mother naked felt more impolite and intrusive than deterring; she mentally apologized to the older woman. Baseball stats were not engaging enough and crime statistics were too morbid. Eventually, she settled on the hurt on Maura’s face when Jane had tried to keep Maura from leaving her apartment and the pain in Maura’s voice when she described her fear of losing Jane. There was no greater barrier to sexual arousal than understanding it would hurt the person you loved.

Her ardor somewhat tamped down, Jane tried to settle into sleep. A few minutes of dreamtime later, Maura interrupted her thoughts.

“When I came over to your apartment last week, you never asked me why I chose to have sex with you.”

Jane desperately wished this conversation were being had when she was more conscious and less physically aroused. Cogent responses were forming at the speed of molasses and more than one contained lewd references to Maura’s anatomy. She tried to work her way out of it.

“Maura, can’t we have this conversation in the morning,” she whined. “I’ve been on my feet all day.” She felt Maura tense in her arms and Jane altered her tone. “Also, you deserve to have a real answer and not something out of my exhausted brain. But if you want to talk, I’ll talk.” She hugged Maura closer. “Just try not to hold it against me if I say something stupid.”

“I understand,” she replied. Maura rubbed her head on Jane’s chin. “And I will apply a logic filter to whatever you say to take it in the best possible way.”

Jane let out a snort. “If I knew you could do that, I would ask you to do it all the time.” She let her thumb cautiously roam over Maura’s hands. Too much stimulation might send Jane hurtling out of control but just lying there like a pile of laundry seemed impolite.

She gathered her thoughts as best she could. “Well, you told me you were attracted to me. At the time, that seemed like a good enough reason, all things considered. I’ve known people to have sex
for far less honest reasons: blackmail, boredom, inebriation. I knew a guy who tried to have sex with me once because he was thought it would help his career.”

“Did it work,” the doctor enquired politely.

“Hell no,” snapped Jane. “First off, he wasn’t that cute. Second off, I respect my job too much to compromise it. Regardless,” she continued, attempting to steer the conversation to relevance again. “You made it pretty clear that was what you wanted.” Also, there was the part where Maura had stormed out of the apartment without time for Jane to ask her much of anything, but Jane let that thought slip away.

A few moments ticked by and Jane hoped against hope that Maura had fallen asleep. Alas, the scientist let out her own sigh.

“Even though you aren’t gay,” Maura said. “You still accepted my overt sexual entreaties?”

Only Maura could make a come-on seem like some odd variant of human behavior most likely cataloged in some psychopathology textbook. Jane hesitated. She hadn’t given much thought to grander implications for her personal sexuality than the consequences for her relationship with Maura. After all, how she labeled herself wouldn’t necessarily affect her ability to talk with her best friend. Losing her best friend after having sex with her best friend, on the other hand, was a daily pressing concern and had been for almost the past week.

Now she attempted to tease out her feelings and found herself, either due to fatigue or actual thought process, strangely ambivalent about what this meant in the long run. Jane tried to sort out the correct responses and then realized she had an excuse to be completely incorrect, or at least, not well thought out. She said what was on her mind.

“I am pretty sure there some sort of anthropological social construct that explains how some people like boys and girls.”

Maura let out a huff. “I am aware of bisexuality, pansexuality, gender fluidity, polyamory, and almost every variant of human sexuality possible. Given that you have not expressed any of these in the time I have known you, and indeed have said repeatedly that you only date men and have no sexual interest in women, my question still stands.”

Jane drummed her fingertips on Maura’s wrist. The detective mentally rifled through all the women that she knew men found conventionally attractive. She imagined permutations of breasts, hips, personalities, and hair colors. Nothing piqued her interest. Doing the same for the men in her life continued to elicit the same response she had experienced previously, which was a bit of warmth and a tinge of interest. And then there was Maura, lying next to her, serving as a constant source of sexual arousal despite her bedmate being female.

“Have you fallen asleep, Jane,” inquired Maura anxiously.

“Yes. I have. And now I’m talking to you from some variant of nightmare. Soon, I’ll be showing up for a test I haven’t studied for in my underwear,” said Jane, exasperation in her voice. “Alternatively, I’m concentrating on giving you a response, instead of just making cracks about how goddamn tired I am.”

“I’m sorry,” said Maura. She reached up and caught Jane’s fingers, stilling them against her wrist. “As you can tell, this topic has been causing me some amount of anxiety.”

In spite of her sleepiness, Jane attempted to choose her words carefully. “You and I have drooled
over enough exceptional specimens of manhood,” Jane said, inflecting her tone as Maura’s might, “including Dr. Dreamy today, to confirm that I do indeed prefer male sexual company. So do you. At the same time, I’m attracted to you in a way I might also be attracted to a man?” Jane ended the sentence with an inflection. It was in a completely accurate statement. It was hard to quantify, harder to explain.

“You are attracted to my physical qualities,” pondered Maura. “In an intellectual sense or a visceral sense? When you look at me, is it like you are appreciating a fascinating piece of art or eating your favorite food?”

“Ugh. Maura,” said Jane, rolling on her back, away from Maura, and covering her hands with her eyes. “I’m attracted to you. Who you are. What you are. Yes, I find your…physical attributes… enjoyable, but that is because they are attached to you. Everything I’ve shared with you, good and bad, the fact that I love you and I know you love me, and your willingness to be intimate with me are things that I want to be near.”

“Meaning you would not seek out other female company if things with… Casey… did not progress according to schedule.” Jane heard the catch in Maura’s voice. She got the distinct impression that Maura was fishing for a particular answer and placed Casey’s name in there instead of, oh, Maura’s own name. Jane did not want to dig that hole.

“Not unless the woman was actually a hot guy. I don’t even think I can consider you an exception to the rule. Your sex…”

“Technically, my gender. Sex is biology but homosexual and heterosexual attraction tends to be based on gender. Transgender women may choose to retain their penises instead of having bottom surgery but still consider themselves…”

“Oh my God, Maura, can we not talk about chopping up some girls, guys, whoever’s, penis, right now? Your timing on genital anatomy is…inexplicable.” Jane once again wish this conversation were taking place in the morning, after three cups of coffee, preferably while being distracted by almost anything else

“Fine. Your gender didn’t…doesn’t…matter to me. You matter to me. You are someone I want to be with.”

Maura rolled back towards Jane and cuddled herself up in the crook of Jane’s shoulder. Jane’s ability to be exasperated was almost completely stripped away when looking at Maura in her arms. Even without meaning to, Jane wrapped her other arm around Maura and began rubbing the small of her back idly.

“Then why didn’t you do anything before?”

“Well, like I said at the time, it just didn’t occur to me,” shrugged Jane. “But when you kissed me…” Jane fumbled for words again. “It was like, I don’t know, like chasing down a murder suspect or tackling a guy with a gun. Kind of like the time I shot myself?”

Maura propped herself up on her elbow and glared at Jane. “You are saying having sex with me is like causing yourself great bodily harm?”

“No, Maura,” said Jane pressing her friend back down with her free arm. “When I do those kind of things, I’m not consciously contemplating the consequences or engaging in complex analyses. As much as you hate my saying this, I go with my gut.”
Jane nuzzled Maura’s forehead and Maura’s eyes closed as Jane resumed rubbing her back. “The moment you kissed me, I knew the right thing to do was to kiss back. The right thing to do was to take you into my bed and make love to you and have you make love to me.”

“Surely you engaged higher cortical functions at some point during our encounter,” replied Maura with slight derision. “Did you ever think about the consequences once we had completed our lovemaking?”

“Not really,” confessed Jane. “I’ve never been very good at figuring out the long-term consequences of various romantic or sexual entanglements. I go with what’s enjoyable for me and handle the outcome in the morning. You know, breakfast in bed, kiss and goodbye, or a walk of shame as he strolls out to the T.”

Maura took a breath and asked quietly, “If I had stayed, would my leaving have been a walk of shame that morning?”

Jane shook her head rapidly. “No. Not at all. Walk of shame usually involves sneaking away from a god-awful, terrible idea of a sexual encounter.” Jane mentally noted handful of times she’d woken up, disgusted and confused, next to someone who seemed like such a fantastic catch when she was five beers into her evening. Luckily, years of breaking back into her house after missing curfew let her break out of a guy’s apartment with equal stealth and speed.

Jane’s voice was urgent and forceful. “Having sex with someone you love and who loves you is nothing to be ashamed of. You didn’t do anything wrong. We didn’t do anything wrong. I didn’t go on a grand journey of sexual exploration after our encounter because I was more worried that I was losing my best friend than what it meant for me to have sex with a woman. Given the choice between worrying about you and worrying about me, which one do you think I’d choose?”

“And you don’t regret it,” Maura said, her voice more strained.

Jane held Maura as tightly as she could without clotheslining the smaller woman. “Nope. I would not go back and change a single moment other than to soak my pots a bit more thoroughly before we made love.” She felt Maura’s laughter.

“See, I told you we should clean the kitchen.”

“Well, we did enough for you not to be distracted, right? Or are you going to tell me you were focusing on the state of my copper-bottom saucepan while I was focusing on, you know, your… copper…bottom.”

Jane felt a bit embarrassed at the memory. This was the first time she had outwardly discussed their sexual experience with anyone. Now that things with Maura were going back to normal, maybe the two of them could process the sex just like they had whenever Jane or Maura brought home a new lover.

“But seriously, Maura, the only thing I’ve regretted was hurting you. If I could avoid that, I would redo everything else in a heartbeat.”

Maura rolled over once again, but this time she balanced herself over Jane, focusing on her face with a solemn look of desire and need gleaming in her hazel eyes.

“In spite of your earlier warning, you have done an excellent job of answering my questions at this late hour.”

Jane blinked a few times in tired confusion. “I’ve passed the test, Dr. Isles,” she said jokingly. “Is my
reward some sleep?"

“Mmm…something better, I think.”

Maura leaned down and kissed Jane, hard and deep, stripping away all of Jane’s desperately fought for self-control. Jane wrapped her legs around Maura and dug her hands into Maura’s hair. She relished the feel of cool satin on her legs, the hardness of Maura’s nipples pressing against their shirts, and the constant heat of Maura’s body.

Then the angels of her better nature, or at least the fear of Maura’s grief, took over. Jane broke the kiss and eased Maura back onto the bed with as much grace as she could manage.

Jane’s voice was tight in her chest. “Maura, I think you need to go back to your room,” she said hoarsely.

“Have I injured you,” whispered the smaller woman.

Jane clenched her eyes shut. “No. Just the opposite.” Her libido and her body were screaming at her to resume kissing Maura, but she held those forces at bay. “I want to protect you from everything and everyone out there, from bad guys to your mother to exotic diseases I can’t pronounce. That includes protecting you from yourself…and from me. You trusted me to respect your wishes five nights ago. Trust me to uphold them now.”

“But Jane,” replied Maura urgently. She pushed against Jane, twining their legs together. “I want you to. I need you to.”

With agonizing strength, Jane pulled her body away, leaving just their hands touching. “It’s late. We’re tired and not thinking clearly. I love you and I will never take advantage of you when you’re not yourself, so I am going to trust your awake brain when it told me we shouldn’t be sexual again.”

Maura searched out Jane’s face and flickered her eyes over her features. “What if I said I’d reconsidered?” Her fingertips traced Jane’s mouth and began to trail down the nape of her neck and along Jane’s collarbone while Maura’s other hand began its way over her hips. Another surge of wetness almost made Jane give into the sensation. She could imagine rolling Maura over and possessing her again, then allowing Maura to reciprocate. God, she wanted that so much, but she also knew her limits.

With yet another burst of frustrated strength, she caught both of Maura’s hands and brought them back to her sides. “I would say we can talk about this tomorrow after we’ve both had some sleep and a little distance.”

Maura relaxed into Jane and tugged her hands away to cover her face. She drew her hair back and turned away.

“You’re right. It was cruel of me to put you in this position. I’ll go back to my room.”

“Maura, wait…listen…” Jane watched Maura slide out of bed and readjust her pajamas to more fully cover herself. Jane propped herself up on both of her elbows. “I’m not rejecting you. I’m asking you to leave because I love you so damn much and I don’t want to hurt you. You’ve told me a romantic relationship with me hurts you,” said Jane urgently. “No matter how much I might want it, I can’t.”

Maura paused at the door of the bedroom. Jane couldn’t see her face and was glad Maura’s voice was steady and without obvious emotion. “I appreciate the explanation. Good night, Jane.”

A sliver of light from the hallway came and went across the bed as Maura opened and closed the
door. The room was silent, finally, and no one was there to interrupt. It took Jane two hours to drift into a fitful sleep.
Complications

Stupid. Maura almost never used the word regardless of context and even less often when she was speaking of herself. In this searing daylight that poured over her that morning, it was the only word that reverberated true. Stupid last night, to approach Jane and try to have sex with her. Stupid two days ago, when she told Jane she didn’t want a relationship. Stupid last week for making her fantasy a reality without thinking of the consequences. Stupid, altogether, for falling in love with a straight woman when Maura herself was straight.

She had feared seeing Jane that morning but felt no relief when she searched the house for her friend. The bedroom was empty. The sheets had been stripped and put into the hamper, the bed crisply remade with fresh linens, and the rest of the room arranged to Maura’s liking. The room was a single load of laundry away from being reset to a time before Maura decided to ruin everything by kissing Jane again.

She paced out of the hallway. The kitchen was spotless, save a pot of coffee, non-instant at that, and a mug waiting on the table. The fridge confirmed Jane had taken the last of their leftovers, the dishwasher stacked with detergent already in the door, and the counters wiped down of their crumbs. The part of Maura that hoped Angela had done these tasks were quieted by the realization that Angela had the day off and was likely relishing some much-needed sleep in her own bed.

Jane had erased all trace of her visit from Maura’s home, leaving it as close to sterile as Jane could without waking Maura up. She hadn’t waited for Maura so they could drive together. She didn’t leave a note. She didn’t text a message. She merely vanished in a whirlwind of cleaning. Maura had never suspected a clean house could feel so empty and painful.

The drive in was silent. NPR provided no solace from the chorus of self-loathing that she was generating. Empty. Stupid. Jane had left in the kindest and cruelest way possible. Nothing to provide a constant reminder of regret, no time to say goodbye or reconsider. Maura picked up and put down the phone a dozen times, fearing more the empty message of Jane’s voicemail than the ever-attentive traffic police enforcing Massachusetts’ various anti-texting laws. Maura was rarely so reckless, but Maura was rarely this hurt.

She greeted no one in the lobby and vanished into the basement. Work was occurring, processing the elements of the crime scene they had visited yesterday, but nothing for Maura to do. No organic matter or unknown element awaited her. Only ceiling tiles and upholstery, envelopes and scraps of paper. There was nothing to distract her from the torture that was Jane’s absence.

Thirty minutes of unsuccessful online research on new forensic techniques later, she gave in to the desperate nagging and called upstairs. Jane did not answer. Instead, it was Korsak’s chipper baritone that informed Maura that Jane was out with Detective Frost getting coffee, ignoring her friend in favor of her partner and her work. Maura clicked down the black plastic phone and tried to immerse herself in whatever distraction she could locate. The words swam in front of her eyes and every second of concentration was hindered by a millisecond of self-doubt. Stupid. Stupid Maura. She pressed her head into her hands and tried to make it seem like she was tired instead of desperately holding back tears.

“Dr. Isles,” said the voice in front of her. “Can I come in?”

The large frame of the senior detective filled her doorway. Korsak, his shirt perpetually rumpled and his suits always two decades behind the latest fashion, addressed her with the polite inquisitiveness he reserved exclusively for her. His wide, lined face had an expression of blank gentility one might
have when visiting the office of one’s professor during college: interested in interaction, cautious not to intrude.

Maura swallowed her grief and rubbed her eyes once again. “Of course, Detective. I was just…” she fumbled for a hives-proof lie, “trying to get some reading done.”

“I don’t blame you,” he nodded, walking into her office and closing the door behind him with a solid ‘thunk’. “It’s hard to wait for evidence, especially when there’s so little of it. Paper and computers,” he waved his hand. “Give me a few hours of walking through a crime scene any day.”

She gritted her teeth and nodded. Conversation was brutally difficult as the wounded parts of her made her want to scream and the silent parts of her battled to keep her quiet. Force of habit and built-in politeness caused her to gesture to a chair. “Please, sit. What can I do for you?”

He walked forward and perched on the edge of her desk. She worried the wooden structure might splinter under his bulk, but instead it sagged as he balanced himself expertly on one scuffed shoe.

“Actually, I was wondering if there was anything I could do for you.” His voice was warm and personal, filled with concern and affection that reminded her of every father she had hoped to have. The cold professor and violent criminal who shared her life had never spoken to her this way. She found her ability to stay together collapsing under the weight of his kindness.

The tears forced their way out and she covered her face futilely with her fingers. She hated crying on the best of days and was pathologically fearful of doing so in front of another person. They would always want to hold her, which made her claustrophobic and even more conscious of the terribleness of her grief, or talk to her, which never relieved her sorrow. This desperate, unbridled crying in front of a man who was her friend was the consummation of all her fears.

He did not move and he did not talk. He let her cry and as embarrassed as she was to break down, she was grateful for the space. As she tried to regain control, she felt his hand on her shoulder, less to comfort and more to steady. She found herself not minding it and responding to his presence by calming down. She breathed more evenly, trying to clear all the fluids from her sinuses and finding herself unable to do so.

Her guest shifted and a white square of fabric appeared in front of her. She took it and blew her nose loudly, then dabbed her eyes, being careful not to cross-contaminate her delicate ocular membranes with the flora in her nasal passages. No need to get conjunctivitis in addition to her emotional turmoil.

Maura folded the soggy handkerchief and handed it sheepishly back to Korsak. She could not help herself and said, “Handkerchiefs are reservoirs of bacteria and viral particles.”

He was unoffended. In fact, he seemed amused as he took the fabric and stuffed it into his back pocket. “Well, that’s why I bleach them every morning.” He leaned back a bit. “And you’re welcome.”

She sat quietly with him, unable to respond. He was not Jane. Even so, he knew her defenses. He knew her desire to hide behind science when emotion was too brutal. He took what should have been an insult to his kindness and recognized it as an expression of gratitude.

He took the initiative. “I try not to get involved in personal matters. After three failed marriages, I recognize my talents aren’t in handling relationships and understanding emotions.”

She dredged up a smile and let him continue.
“But I know that you and Jane are struggling. I see it in her and I see it in you. This isn’t the same as when she shot your father or you turned in her brother. This is something much deeper, something about the two of you and not your families.”

Maura looked at him and tried to formulate a response. She didn’t feel comfortable discussing her sexuality with anyone but Jane. At the same time, who else could she confide it? At the same time, what if he rejected her or worse, found her story titillating? At the same time, she needed someone to help her, a rarity among rarities in her life.

He didn’t let her speak and made a gesture of pausing. “I don’t need the particulars. That part is none of my business. What is my business is the happiness of my two friends, my partner and the best damn forensic scientist in the country.” He placed his hand back on her shoulder and nodded his head. “I don’t know you as well as I know Jane, but I know Jane goddamn well. And I know she cares about you more deeply than she cares anyone else.”

He smiled. “When you disappeared that night because Paddy Doyle…your father,” he amended, “kidnapped you, I believed her when she answered the phone with, ‘Whatever you want, I’ll get it.’ At that moment, she would have gone out and robbed a string of banks without hesitation.”

Maura smiled, unforced. She remembered that greeting. The stress of the encounter with the mobster who spirited her away in restraints had clicked down a few settings hearing her friend’s anxious but determined voice. Whatever Maura wanted, Jane would get. But right now Maura wanted Jane and that was no longer feasible. The smile dissolved and Maura found her voice.

“I drove her away, Detective.” His first name never seemed to sit comfortable on her palate. The formal term was better. “She had offered me something amazing, something sublime, and I… couldn’t accept it. I was afraid. It’s irrational, I know,” she said, tilted back in her chair. “Being afraid of a gift from my best friend is as illogical as being afraid of the common house spider. Once I understood that, it was too late.”

She searched his face for signs of comprehension. He was peering upwards, his eyes towards the ceiling in the universal body language of thoughtful recall. Then he replied in a cautious, framed tone.

“Fear isn’t rational. Sure, it serves a purpose…keeps us out of trouble, keeps us safe…but it also makes things that should be easy a lot harder.” He rubbed the back of his neck and gave a wry smile. “I think at least one of my marriages could have been saved if I hadn’t been afraid of being rejected. Here I was, a young cop who could walk into a drug bust with any number of wiseguys without blinking an eye. But put me in a kitchen with my wife and I would freeze.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t me…”

“Nah, don’t worry about it Dr. Isles,” he said, easing himself off the desk and stretching. “I made my peace with all of those women a long time ago.” He looked down at her with a creased brow. “Talk to Jane. I’m sure she’d understand.”

“I tried,” responded Maura with more emotion than she had intended. “And…she…she told me that she wanted to protect me, which meant not…giving me what I wanted, or thought I wanted… because it would hurt me.”

She remembered a technique actors used to channel their emotions. She focused less on the tears and knot that clenched in the back of her oropharynx and spread down into her gut. She tried to push her attention to any other part of her body, something as far from her lacrimal ducts and clenching teeth as possible. It was barely working.
“Then tell her you don’t need protecting,” Korsak said, with a bit of force in return. “Tell her you are able to make your own choices, including changing your mind, and accept the consequences.” He chuckled. “Listen, we’re trained from the moment we step into the academy to throw ourselves in front of danger, but it takes a long time to remember not everyone wants or need saving.” He leaned back on his heels. “And if she doesn’t believe you, tell her again. You’re the only one she listens to, remember? But even you need to repeat it.”

“It’s coming in loud and clear, Korsak,” replied a warm, smooth voice. Maura hadn’t seen the door open or heard her friend’s footfalls. Yet there in front of her, the detective in her trimly cut dark grey suit leaned on the doorframe with a cocky grin on her face. All of Maura’s fears coalesced again and stampeded into the rawness of Maura’s desire for this beautiful, imposing woman.

“Ah. That’s my signal,” he said, shifting his portly frame away from the pathologist. “Good talking to you, doc. I’ll be upstairs. Let me know if the techs find anything else on those tiles.” He walked out and eased his way past Jane, giving her an affectionate half-pat, half-shove into the room. The door closed once more, leaving the two women alone.

Jane crossed Maura’s office in two long strides and tugged Maura to standing. Then, she enveloped the smaller woman in her arms and kissed the top of her head as Maura broke down. She tore herself in two, fighting the urge to flee from the intensity of the contact and dying over and over in the warmth of Jane’s embrace.

“I am sorry, I am so, so sorry, Jane. I was wrong to push you away. I realized that too late and now—“

“Shh, I’m here, Maura,” reassured Jane. “I’m not going anywhere. If you want me here, I’m here.”

“I do,” admitted Maura, “and I-I don’t-“ She pulled away to look up at Jane, trying to resolve her friend’s beautiful face through the haze of tears. “Everything I said yesterday was true, as was everything the day before, and the day before that. I want you and I am afraid of losing you. I don’t know what the correct course of action is.”

Jane leaned down and rested her cheek on the top of Maura’s head. “Then we don’t make decisions right now, okay? We keep things as is.”

“But what does that mean,” insisted Maura.

“I’d be lying if I said I had a clue,” smiled Jane, “but for now it means we love each other and do what feels right. No forced distance or hesitation. If you want to kiss me, do it. If you want to do… something more,” Jane wavered back and forth, “well, try not to do it when I’m so tired that I’d fail a sobriety test.”

Maura laughed from within the depths of Jane’s embrace. “No danger of that right now. Everything feels so uncertain.”

Jane sighed dramatically and unwrapped herself, fishing in her pocket for a crumpled tissue. “And we know what that means. A five-thousand-dollar shopping spree at Excessive Handbags ’r Us down on Newbury Street.” She handed over the lint-ridden paper, which Maura eyed dimly. There was no telling how many times Jane had made use of it, though its texture did suggest a fresh piece. She internally squirmed and blew her nose. “Some people have security blankets. You have shopping sprees.”

“That is a grotesque exaggeration,” she insisted. “I have never spent that much when stressed.”

“Really? Remember six months ago when Ma got the call from the doctor about a suspicious lump
on her breast. Twenty-four hours later the kitchen looked like the world’s most expensive indoor farmer’s market.”

“Fresh fruit is known to have antioxidant powers,” said Maura quickly. “I wanted to promote a healing atmosphere for your mother.” She threw the tissue into the trash can and applied a liberal amount of hand sanitizer to herself as much for her own secretions as for whatever had been lingering on the tissues before her use.

“Two thousand dollars in heirloom peaches and an-Jew pears,” wailed Jane.

“It’s Anjou,” interrupted Maura, who was ignored during Jane’s continuing faux-hysterics.

“I had to bring three boxes to the homeless guys down on Main Street and even they started turning me down.” She gave a dramatic wave of her arms, then crossed them over her chest and went more somber. “Feeling a little better?”

Maura tilted her chin up at Jane, whose dark velvet eyes admired the expanse of her body with desire and concern. “I am, thank you. I would like to resume this conversation further but this is not the time or place.”

“I agree,” said Jane. “Especially since I was coming down here to tell you we might have a new lead. I was hoping you could cast eyes on him.”

Jane stood on the other side of the interrogation glass. As much as she wanted to be in there, she felt it would be a little bit more fun for Korsak and Frost to take the lead. The portly gentleman was usually better against violent lowlifes and Frost rarely had the knack for hard-core grilling but they suspected this man would be unnerved by being fooled.

Plus, Jane wanted to be near Maura, who was perched on the desk beside her. Jane used a ridiculous amount of willpower to keep from wrapping one hand around Maura’s waist and pulling her close. The tear stains had been washed off and makeup carefully reapplied, but Jane could sense the core of uncertainty. Her protective instincts and her love for Maura made leaving this room undesirable.

She looked at their suspect carefully as he paced around the room. His hawk-sharp face and sunken brown eyes were framed by a tight glossy ponytail of silvering hair. He wore a neat gray suit, a subtle purple shirt, and a dark tie accented by a pair of cufflinks far gaudier than the rest of the ensemble.

"Hey Maura?” Jane pointed with a finger at the gentleman's arms. "What you think of those?”

"I am guessing you do not mean the suit. This case has provided us with recent couture from the finest men’s clothiers in the city, enough that it may improve the look of most of our male companions.” Maura said mildly.

"Did you make a joke," said Jane. The situation allowed her to put her arm around Maura and squeeze her playfully as Jane would have before all this happened. Maura’s body tightened and relaxed. She twisted her face into a small smile and looked up at her friend mischievously.

"Occasionally I do that to keep things interesting,” she said, returning her gaze to the suspect. "They are very unusual. Far more than one would expect from a gentleman dressed in this Italian nouveau-riche style. I cannot see them from this distance. Perhaps I can ask Korsak to rip them off during the
"Or we can try confiscating them as evidence," said Jane. “Primarily as evidence of bad taste, but still.”

She went back to staring at their suspect. No lawyer, which surprised her. He had made a few phone calls when he got to the station but here he was, sitting alone. He didn't look nervous per se; more miffed than anxious. It was a look of a man whose pizza was late, not the look of a man whose lawyer had abandoned him when he was about to be questioned in a murder.

When the two other detectives entered the room, he turned on the shiny heel and looked at them. He gave a polite nod of the head and stretched his hand out to Korsak.

"Detective. You have quite the convincing façade earlier. I would never have suspected you were a member of the Boston police force, so convincing was your guise." Before Korsak could initiate a snappy retort, the man continued, "Although my lawyer is detained, I have done this enough to know the drill. I would like to make a deal."

Frost and Korsak looked at each other improbably. Jane did the same. "I don’t think I've ever seen this tactic before," said Jane. "A guy like this has a lot to lose talking openly to the police."

"Maybe he's a very skilled liar," proposed Maura.

"Maybe so."

Her partners felt similarly to Jane. "That's a very interesting tactic you have, Mr, um,"

"Migliaccio," he said, sitting in the middle chair in front of them. "Alfonso Migliaccio. Importer exporter to the stars."

Maura tugged on Jane's elbow urgently "I've heard of him,” she said in a stage whisper. "It said he can get almost anything in the art world. There are rumors he's been smuggling antiques out of Iraq but the FBI has been unable to conclusively tie him to the trade."

"Maura, why are you whispering,” said Jane playfully. "They can't hear us. That's the whole point of this booth." The two techs next her looked at her with consternation. "That and recording and monitoring the discussion. Sorry, guys." They looked back at their computers.

Sadly, the two other detectives had no idea of their companion’s profession. "Well, I guess I'm not enough of a star because I've never heard of you, Mr. Migliaccio," said Detective Frost.

Frost leaned towards the older man, who did not flinch away. Instead, he smiled tolerantly.

"Given that a police officer's salary would be insufficient to purchase any of the items I export, I would concur.” He turned back towards Korsak. "What am I being charged with?"

"You're willing to make a deal and you don't even know it are being held on?"

"You'll recall that there was a bit of a scuffle when you pick me up this morning. I do not really have time to get the particulars," he gave a noncommittal shrug. "I assume it has something to do with my business. When you work in art importation, there are often misunderstandings leading to interactions with the law. Although a lengthy court case is possible, in most circumstances law enforcement prefers to levy a fine."

Jane and Korsak must have thought the same thing since Korsak said, "You mean you bribe the
"Nothing that crass, Detective Korsak. I have found, however, that police departments who know of my reputation are disinterested in wasting their resources pursuing any spurious charges against me. They obviously will not succeed where the federal government has failed regarding my imports. We come to a deal." His smile betrayed the meaning behind the word. "I've done this at least twice with some of your colleagues in this very police force. I'm surprised they are not here to assist me."

"That sneaky son of a-" said Jane, biting her finger. "Ugh."

"Is what he is saying accurate," asked Maura anxiously. "Would we have paid off someone like this?"

"I don't know, Maura. When budget belts are tightened, no prosecutor is going to waste his time chasing illegal masks when the idiot who shot one of his friends on Commonwealth Avenue is a more immediate danger." Jane side rubbed her forehead with one hand. "Yeah, I could see this happening. Not homicide, mind you, but maybe gang unit? Drug unit?"

"Insinuations aside, Mr. Migliaccio, you are being charged as an accessory to murder," said Korsak.

The importer's neatly trimmed eyebrows rose. "Murder," said the slim gentleman, his tone incredulous in a way that made Jane suspect he was lying. "I can assure you that there is no murder involved in the procurement of my goods."

"That's a lie," said Maura sternly. "Given with this man does, surely multiple individuals will have died during the acquisition of his antiques. Soldiers looting sacked cities and bounty hunters cutting their way through native villages are the primary sources of such goods."

Jane wished the two techs weren't around so she could pull Maura close and kiss her. "That's one of the things I lo-", she caught herself, "-like about you, Maura. You think of the big picture and not just the technicalities."

Maura beamed at her. "Thank you, Jane." She might have said more but instead she turned back to the scene unfolding in the interrogation room.

"Regardless, Mr. Migliaccio, we were directed to you involving the death of one Ralph Lauren." Korsak leaned forward and Mr. Migliaccio steepled his fingers in front of him on the table, tapping them together.

"Oh dear. I had wondered what had happened to Mr. Lauren." His voice suggested an attempt at legitimate concern.

"You know this guy," asked Korsak.

"Yes. I was informed Mr. Lauren needed temporary employment and was willing to undertake a dangerous task. As you know, procurement of unusual artifacts from overseas can be physically taxing and -"

"Yeah, and pretty boys like you don't smuggle," Korsak sneered.

Migliaccio deflected the comment. "Purchasing unusual objets d'art from Africa and bringing them to the United States is not smuggling, Detective Korsak. Regardless, I do employ gentlemen such as Mr. Lauren from time to time and I find they perform quite well. Most are eager to discharge their debt and very few look too carefully at what they are bringing, especially given the penalty for failure."
His voice smoldered for a moment and Jane got the feeling this man could be very dangerous, ten thousand dollar suit notwithstanding.

"When he called me a few days ago and told me he would not be giving me my item, I was quite surprised. However, it was not worth my time at that moment to go after him."

"You know he was carrying your, um, product?" Frost danced around the specifics of Mr. Lauren’s mode of carriage.

"Many of these men believe they can fetch a better price if they sell on the black market, regardless of mode of transport." Migliacco shrugged. "They usually come back to me when they recognize no one is going to pay what I will. And I do pay out, unlike all those other hoodlums. I believe in doing business, not fleecing imbeciles."

"Well, he found a buyer," replied Korsak. "Your colleague Jimmy Conroy said Mr. Lauren came to him with $5000 in cash, which I assume is not how you do your business."

"Not if I can help, no," said Migliaccio, smiling. "It wreaks havoc with the taxes. I assumed he would come back to me. He did not. Now I know why. How did he die?"

Frost, usually the more squeamish, took this as a chance to lean very close to Mr. Migliaccio.

"He bled to death in a dental office when somebody screwed up removing 50 pounds of osmium sewed into his stomach. Or are you going to tell us the spheres of the densest metal known to man are African object d’art?"

Migliaccio took in a short breath and let it out. "I see. This complicates our negotiation, Detective Frost. I was under the impression we were discussing bringing a questionably sourced piece of statuary back from the Congo, not a man importing metal in his abdomen."

Frost sensed he had his prey cornered. "Well, you’re wrong. I don't care what you looted from my relatives. I care that you filled the man with shiny balls and sent him over the border. I want to know who paid you and I want to know why."

Jane smiled. “Good catch, Frost,” she said.

His prey seemed suspiciously resistant to scare tactics. "Mr. Lauren’s debt was larger than most of his colleagues and the immediacy was greater than average. As a result, I let him in on one of the stranger requests I had received. I was approached by an intermediary for a group who needed osmium."

"Which group," pressed Frost. “Why didn’t they ask you to bring the osmium through traditional means? It’s not illegal.”

"I do not know on either account," he replied. “I was informed market forces were not in their favor in the US vis-à-vis osmium procurement. Under our agreement, I arranged for processed spheres to be brought to the hospital in Cape Town. They were implanted by doctors all too happy to have their yearly salary quintupled for an unusual but simplistic surgery."

"And when he arrived back in the states, I assume you had a group of doctors ready to do the same," demanded Frost.

"A doctor’s salary is finite, Detective Frost. When certain individuals find themselves in need of money and have no interest in dealing with the black market, they are all too willing to assist me. Such a team was available, but Mr. Lauren never showed."
“You’re very cavalier about admitting this,” said Korsak. “Aren’t you worried we’re going to arrest you for trafficking?”

He laughed. “Detective Korsak, let me reframe this. I have not done anything illegal. It is not illegal to have bizarre surgery abroad. It is not illegal to have surgery to remove metal from your body. It is not illegal for me to sell osmium or to bring it into the US.”

“It is illegal to bring metal out of South Africa and into the US without declaring you are importing it,” said Frost.

Maura elbowed Jane and whispered, “I told him this. He was surprisingly receptive to being taught about the complexities of international precious metal trading.”

Jane smiled to conceal a wince. She would never admit to being similarly welcoming of Maura’s intellect. Part of their interaction was Jane’s constant squelching of Maura’s educational forays. Maybe it was an attempt to force Maura to keep up with Jane’s fast-paced life or to make Jane feel on level with her brilliant partner. Something to unwrap in the coming weeks.

“Indeed, and if one were to track the metal to me, I would pay the fine. There is nothing criminal about these actions; they are civil transgressions.”

“To recap, you expect us to believe you know neither the buyer nor the method of Mr. Lauren’s death. You only supplied access to the materials and let ‘market forces’ do the rest.” Korsak waggled his fingers in midair.

“That is correct, Detective.” Migliacci glanced over at his phone. “Ah, this is my lawyer texting. I fear we will need to continue this later.”

The detectives left the room frustrated and joined the two women in the outer office.

“Cool customer,” said Jane. “That’s likely all we’ll get out of him. I bet BPD will be a few thousand dollars richer and he’ll be out on the street, pushing art in back alleys.”

“It’s more likely he’s arranging for private auctions outside of the public eye. The conditions in the average alley would ruin all but the most indestructible of pieces.” Maura must have felt Jane’s aggravated glare. “Well, regardless, he is an unsavory individual engaging in indefensible practices.”

“We know there’s a buyer and we know there’s a seller.” Jane made a flip-flop gesture with her hands. “The seller is untouchable…what about the buyer?”

“Osmium,” mused Maura. “It all comes back to the osmium. It’s an unusual metal, not used in many manufacturing practices. Mostly it’s found in alloys of iridium…”

“Of course,” said Maura, almost dropping her coffee. “Alloys and processing.” She ran over to her computer, pushing Jane out of the way as her fingertips drummed on the keyboards. “Osmium is most often obtained through nickel wasting. Incredibly toxic, incredibly damaging to the environment.”

“So call up Greenpeace,” muttered Jane. “I’m sure they’d be happy to picket Mr. Lauren’s funeral.”

“That office is all about sustainability and medical devices,” said Maura urgently. She brought up the Sustainable Solutions website and clicked through to the upcoming ventures. In addition to dentistry, there was also a surgical waste recycling sector, a medical device manufacturing company, and an in-house pharmaceutical synthesizing group. She pointed to the latter two groups.
“I read about cancer trials using osmium metal as a catalyst but to pass muster, the companies would need a clean source of metal, one mined with minimal environmental damage.” She began glancing at the confused faces. “The only countries in the world that could certify their osmium as environmentally friendly are the US and the UK, neither of which produces a significant amount of osmium and both of which produce metal that is extremely expensive.”

Jane’s detective mind clicked faster. “Maybe these guys can’t get the goods any other way, yeah? They pay someone like Migliacco to bring in the metal and forge a paper trail that will stand up to the investors. Migliacco pays a schmuck like Ralphie boy to sneak it into the country via internal courier.” She smirked.

“But Dr. Isles,” questioned Frost, “you said it’s legal to import osmium. He could have shipped it in a crate and done the paperwork here.”

Maura shook her head. “The US has a record of all platinum-group metals imported each year. According to the US Mineral Commodities Summary, in 2013, only 77 kilograms were imported.”

Jane squinted at Maura. “You know this off the top of your head? Do I need to get you a new hobby or something?”

The agitated smile that Maura usually shot at Jane had a hint of lasciviousness. Jane could envision being Maura’s hobby enough time to get her off government websites forever. Maybe even off online shopping. Jane suppressed a shiver of anticipation.

“I looked it up when attempting to trace the source during the autopsy,” said Maura. “Adding another fifty kilograms would be an obvious flag. Sneaking the metal in biologically and disguising the source as recycled or locally mined would solve the problem.”

Jane sighed. “But how do we get from motive to murder? We can guess that Migliacco knew the buyer but we will spend a billion years trying to get him to answer our questions.”

Maura smiled coyly. “We don’t target Migliacco. We target the very lovely gentleman who was trying to take me to dinner yesterday.”

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The Indian restaurant had pristine reviews and had been recommended by half a dozen medical colleagues. The décor was impeccable and the ambiance beyond reproach. Her company was attractive and intelligent. None of these balanced out Maura’s desire to signal for the check immediately after ordering.

For all his charms, Dr. Roginsky was an odd conversationalist. Maura found herself wading through a morass of Eastern philosophy twisted beyond recognition into a variant that supported both ruthless venture capitalism and New Age enlightenment. She pitied the sanity of any transcriptionist who might want to make an official record of this ridiculous interaction.

As their conversation wound ever longer, she found herself becoming distracted with what was waiting for her in Jane’s apartment. The agreement before she left for dinner was a friendly visit. They would spend the night together, clothed, and not engage in anything sexual due as much to fatigue as worry about further complications. Jane wanted to provide Maura certainty and security, which she felt could be accomplished by having Maura stay over. On the other hand, a week of sleepless nights made sexual encounters ill-advised at best. Maura looked forward to it nonetheless. Last night had been so excruciating that almost anything would be better.
She eventually dragged something useful from the conversation. Yes, one of the groups was looking at alternative metals for manufacturing eco-friendly chemotherapy, in part due to the expense of platinum. Yes, these ventures were struggling. No, osmium hadn’t come up specifically but here was a twenty-minute discussion on all of osmium’s magic properties. Yes, he could put her in touch with some of these people. No, he didn’t think Mr. Lauren had met any of them but he wasn’t privy to the goings-on of a handyman. After turning him down for a nightcap and dodging a kiss, she fled the restaurant close to midnight.

The information was transmitted to the rest of the team, who decided bright and early tomorrow morning to launch their attack on the staff of those companies. Perhaps they could set up a sting with the metal? Not tonight, though.

She knocked on Jane’s door with her heart in her throat. The last time she had been there had been a consummation, an act of perfection, and an unmitigated disaster in equal breaths. No answer. She knocked again, letting each rap of her knuckles disperse her agitation into the door. A third time she knocked, and loudly whispered, “Jane!” She hoped the next-door neighbor who had replaced the two-timing detective was equally tolerant of odd visits to Jane’s apartment.

The door creaked open and Jane stood in front of her, sagging against the doorframe in a rumpled white undershirt and a pair of Red Sox sweatpants with a hole in the seam.

“Maura,” she croaked. “It’s midnight. Just…let yourself in? I know you have the key.”

Maura bustled her way into the living room. “I don’t want to frighten you. Historically walking into your home unannounced leads to acts of unexpected violence and shouting. I would prefer neither.”

Jane waved at her and trudged into the bedroom, but not before she flopped a hand at a bag on the couch. “I grabbed some clothes from your place. I think they match.” She vanished into the bedroom and shut the door.

Maura rifled through the plastic with consternation. The black and white ensemble was out of fashion by at least a year, totally inappropriate for this time of the season, and even worse, clashed hideously with her shoes. It had also been tossed on the couch like a dishrag and bore the sign of Joe Friday having made it her temporary home before settling into her dog bed.

“You could have hung them up,” she scowled, following Jane into the bedroom.

“I could have,” agreed Jane, “but I worried consorting with your clothing would make my pants jealous.”

Jane face-planted into her bed and crawled under the covers. “There’s toothpaste and floss in the bedroom. I didn’t bring your makeup bag because I was worried I’d somehow transform it into an unusable chemical slop.” She buried her face into her pillow as Maura flipped on the bathroom light and did a meager job of her usual evening routine. Her customary ten step skincare routine was stripped down to washing her face as carefully as she could with hand soap and praying she had enough lotion in her purse to keep her skin from peeling off.

Beside the sink there was a folded washcloth, monogrammed with the letters ALN, a clean t-shirt, and a pair of loose shorts. Maura felt a little silly slipping into Jane’s clothing but the alternative was sleeping naked. The temptation would be too much even for her. She hung her clothing on the hanger and snuck into bed, where Jane was already snoring.

Maura ached to roll over, wake Jane up, and be held. She wanted to talk. She wanted to kiss Jane, over and over, until Jane changed her mind. She had to be respectful, she reminded herself. She had
to maintain the boundaries. No repeats of last night. She curled herself up in the blanket and pushed away the cloud of loneliness that threatened to overtake her.

“Oh, come here,” grunted Jane. “I’m not going to have you sulking all night.”

An arm shot out from behind her and deposited itself ungracefully across her midsection. With a half-hearted tug, Jane pulled Maura towards her body and repositioned the pillows so they could lay more comfortably. She kissed the crook of Maura’s neck and squeezed Maura tight.

“I love you,” mumbled Jane. “Good night Maura.” Then she was asleep one more.

Maura nestled herself into Jane’s arms and sighed happily. It wasn’t an outrageous sexual experience or a deep conversation but it was contentment and familiarity. “I love you,” she whispered to her sleeping companion. Then she too was adrift.

“Good news,” said Frost as the two women walked into the precinct.

Jane handed a coffee over to the co-detective. “And good morning to you, Detective Frost.”

He took a sip and smiled. “Even better now. The warrant for the videos surrounding the Pru have come through. Techs are scanning through them as we speak for signs of who he might have brought with him into the building.”

Jane grinned. “That is good news,” she said. “Maybe we’ll finally make some progress.” They began walking into the screen room and Frost continued his unveiling

“I got into their financials, don’t ask how. These guys aren’t broke. They’re dead broke,” said Frost with a smile. “I doubt they could manufacture banana bread, let alone medical devices.”

Jane elevated an eyebrow. “Banana bread? That’s your comparison to chemotherapy?”

“Well, your mom made some fresh and I stopped down to…anyway,” said Frost, hiding what looked like a crumb-filled napkin into his pocket. “There’s no way these guys can afford high quality materials.”

Jane dangled her knees off the side of the desk and tried not to look at Maura. Waking up in her arms this morning had been a combination of delightful and terrifying. Maura had stayed asleep a few minutes after Jane first awoke. Jane took these extra minutes to inspect the lines of her face, resisting the desire to explore them and memorize them. This was a platonic time, regardless of desire. They had been very good all night, not doing more than enveloping arms and legs in a pattern that was at the edge of chaste, if for no other reason than the first legitimately good night of sleep Jane had in about a week. Between this case and Maura’s uncertainty, she was sure she violated the Geneva convention’s boundaries on sleep deprivation.

In spite of waking up together, the two of them had done everything they could to avoid the topic of why they were in bed together. It was sweet and domestic but very carefully not intimate. They didn’t kiss. Maura more than once customarily dodged out of Jane’s embrace. The conversation they desperately needed to initiate was being yet again put off by the nagging annoyance of this case. Well, that and a long critique of Jane’s nonexistent food supplies.

“These leftovers are from this weekend. Hardly palatable, especially given their meat-based sauce.” With a heave, the contents were thrown into the trash, water run on the Tupperware, and the trashbag sealed. Maura continued her observations. “You don’t have the basics…no eggs, no milk.”
“Well, there’s no snowstorm approaching. The eggs-milk-bread combo only shows up in my house when the French Toast Warning is at least at level 4. Come on. We’ll get something on the way there.” With an affectionate tug, she pulled her friend…girlfriend?...out the door.

One stop at the coffee shop later, they were back in the station, listening to Frost explain all the financial disasters these guys were in.

“It is likely Mr. Lauren encountered these gentlemen in the performance of his duties, overhearing the ‘scuttlebutt’ as they say in the Navy.”

“Where we are not,” groaned Jane. “I am making a law in this building that you’re not allowed to use any military jargon.”

“But Jane, then I could not use the words picket, snafu, or raunchy.” Maura’s delicate cheeks went pink and Jane went in for the kill.

“Then perhaps you shouldn’t be striking, screwing up, or behaving in a scandalous manner.” Jane leaned a bit closer and watched Maura turn a vibrant crimson.

“Lay off, Rizzoli. You shouldn’t penalize Dr. Isles for being literate,” said Korsak, whapping Jane in the shoulder. “God knows we could all use a bit of vocabulary broadening.”

“Anyway, Ralph Lauren puts two and two together,” continued Frost, slurping the rest of his coffee down in a single sip. “He figures there’s a good chance the metal he’s smuggling is for the company he’s working for. Very convenient.”

“You’re telling me some guy who can’t manage to match his socks every morning ends up concocting some sort of elaborate scheme involving surgery? I doubt it.” Jane leaned back and stared at the ceiling. God, this case.

”Yeah but remember this guy ended up stealing $250,000 without being caught,” observed Korsak. “He’s a hustler. He recognized $25,000 was a fraction of what everyone else would be getting once this metal sale went through. He approached the buyer and the buyer arranged for surgery.”

“I’ll bet a loaf of your mom’s banana bread that if we go through the records of these Special Solutions…”

“Sustainable, Detective Frost,” corrected Maura. “The focus of this office is on-“

“Murdering people to get a good price, then lying about the origin of the components. I know, very sustainable. They probably mulch the bodies afterwards and spread them in Boston Commons,” Jane scowled.

“That would be an excellent idea,” said Maura. Her entire demeanor perked upwards. “Human bodies make exceptionally good fertilizer after being crem-“

“Oh God, enough,” sighed Jane, compressing her face with her hands. “Someone please save me from this highly educational foray into human death rites.”

As if on cue, Frankie gestured the cluster into the media room and pointed out few frames of video.

“There’s Ralph, going into the building at about 8:00PM.” The shuffling gait of a man in obvious discomfort clicked past. His face glanced around nervously, looking towards the cameras he had probably disabled and indicating them with his head.
“Here’s another guy, who was smart enough to keep his head and face covered. We’re trying to build a profile based on weight, height…but it’s tricky.” Another figure swathed in scarves and hats walked past Ralph smartly and out of frame.

“Then there’s this one. His face is uncovered but we haven’t found any record of him any database. I think once we get a few more passes over this video, we’ll have some more clues.”

“You won’t need to.” Maura’s face had gone blank and her hands were trembling. Jane found strength she didn’t know she had to keep from holding onto Maura once more. “I know this man. His name is William Fournier.”

“Really? Great. He’s another doctor? That’s our surgeon,” said Frankie triumphantly.

“He is not a surgeon. He is a pathologist, like me. We met at a conference.” Maura stood up abruptly. “I need to tell the chief and then call my lawyer.” She fled the room before Jane could catch her arm.

“What was that about,” asked Frankie. “It’s not a crime to know someone professionally.”

Jane wanted to dig her own mulching hole and fall into it. “They weren’t just…professionally linked.”

“They were…” Korsak began. Jane nodded miserably. “Oh…yeah. That complicates things.”

The banging of an office door and the figure of a disgruntled man, followed by the quick movements of Maura towards her lab, confirmed just how complicated it would be.
Maura knew she wasn't being interrogated per se. Jane, the chief, Korsak, Frost, Frankie, and she suspected Mrs. Rizzoli (had she known) had reassured her of that. This was a formality to clarify the situation and outline their next steps to ensure the best outcome. Sitting here on the wrong side of the interrogation table, her hands clasped in front of her and her lawyer next to her, it was hard to tell the difference. She certainly felt like a suspect. She was being questioned not by one of her friends but by the prosecutor who would take over the case once Maura and Jane successfully solved it. The woman was known for being formidable. Maura was more keenly aware of this fact now that she was her target and not her ally.

"Dr. Isles, against my better judgment I will allow your friends to remain in this room. But let me remind you if they interrupt I will throw them out and conduct this in a far more formal, less collegial way." The petite Korean woman peered at Maura and gestured with a dismissive hand towards the three officers who served as Maura’s official and unofficial backup. Her pointed oval face set its jaw and began grilling Maura.

"How do you know this William Fournier?"

Maura glanced towards her lawyer, who nodded his head. She knew from unfortunate experience that he was worth his $20,000 retainer. In this case, it was to ensure she didn't accidentally implicate herself in something she absolutely had not done.

"He and I met at a conference in Texas. A pathology conference. For pathologists," she said. She could feel Jane covering her eyes from behind her. "I was giving a brief lecture on new techniques to estimate time of death besides liver temperature. I had called it, ‘The Liver Should be Chopped Liver: An Exploration of Alternative Methods for Determining Time of Death’. It was very well received, especially by pathologists who practice in warmer temperatures where- “

"Oh Lord, Dr. Isles," said the prosecutor, pulling her red-tipped fingernails through her short cropped glossy black hair. "I appreciate your precision when you are on the stand but right now I am wishing you were capable of answering in only five-word sentences. You met him at a conference. Define met." She leaned up close the table and Maura and leaned back. The woman had certainly established her social dominance and Maura was unconsciously reacting submissively. It was very disconcerting for her.

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"He approached me after my talk, we had dinner, and then we had, um, a liaison," Maura said. Using the French word seemed to take the crassness of the situation out of it. The prosecutor did away with that conceit.

"Alright. You had a one night stand with some guy at a pathologist conference. I knew these things were a hotbed of sexual activity,” she said dryly. “Maybe the department could send me sometime. After that, did you see him again?"

“Well, not technically. I did not in fact see his face again until I viewed him through that security videotape. However, we communicated several times by text and he expressed interest in coming to visit me. I arranged a date and the hotel where we would be staying.”

“I know where you live Dr. Isles. You have a brownstone none of us but your lawyer could afford even if we pooled all our salaries. Why would you take it upon yourself to stay in a hotel instead of entertaining your gentleman caller…,” The prosecutor injected a bit of sarcasm and Maura winced again. "At a hotel? I assume you have brought home dates before."
Mara inspected her cuticles. They were long overdue for a manicure. She managed to keep them unchipped but the faintest edge of the nails was beginning to show her natural nail color. "He suggested it," she admitted. "He said the two of us should have a lovely weekend enjoying each other's company and perhaps seeing some of the sites around Boston. He also suggested I should pay for it and that he would do the same when I visited him."

She remembered the conversation with consternation. He had made the hotel seem like an opportunity to do something different and dangerous, adding a tinge of the forbidden where there was none in reality. The passing references to not seeing the sights of Boston because they would be too busy had made her blush and raised her pulse. That was happening now, for all the wrong reasons.

"Your surprise at seeing him on the videotape suggests this tryst did not come to pass."

"Your observation is correct, Prosecutor Soon. I waited at the restaurant but he failed to appear. He texted me and said I was not his type."

Two grumbles of disbelief followed by one grunt of disbelief mixed with anger emitted from behind her. The prosecutor seemed to share their opinion, though her commentary lacked their righteous indignation.

"Let me get this straight. You meet a guy at a conference. He spends three days 'getting to know' you. He suggests coming to Boston, which you inexplicably pay for, and then vanishes until we see him again on the Prudential Center's cameras. Your attractiveness as a partner aside, and I mean that in a very clinical sense, I have trouble believing you made the bizarre decision to pay for extremely expensive set of arrangements for a man you barely met. Do you understand the problem having?"

"Prosecutor, let remind you Dr. Isles is here voluntarily. While she acknowledges any part of this discussion may be used later, I would suggest you tread lightly to preserve the relationship you two will share after this case is complete," her lawyer skillfully interrupted. "Dr. Isles was quite enamored of this gentleman. She has stated he was charming and insistent. People do foolish things when pursuing relationships. Paying for airfare and hotel for a man she believed would pay her back is hardly among the most unusual."

"Yeah. Guys don't go Dutch for a reason. No girl is going to go home with a guy who can't pay for dinner and breakfast," said Jane from behind her. Frost must have tapped her on a shoulder to settle her down, as the sound of skin on suit terminated the rest of Jane’s comment. The prosecutor turned her head upwards and narrowed her black lashed eyes.

"Point taken, Mr. Voight. Now, Dr. Isles, have you had any further contact with Dr. Fournier since that time?"

Maura looked at her bag, then at her lawyer. In that moment she realized both cost approximately the same and provided at times equal utility.

"He texted me several times, attempting to reestablish contact. I turned him down twice, then ceased responding and blocked his number. I had no desire to speak to him any longer. I, uh, deleted the texts." The prosecutor wrinkled her face. "I was unaware they would be used as part of an investigation," she added rapidly. "I am sure we can ask Ver-"

"I am aware of how to obtain texting records from a major carrier. Now to my point." She moved her head back to look at Maura’s friends and then back at the doctor. "Can you reassure me this identification of Mr. Fournier is not an elaborate method of getting back at someone who stood you up at a fancy restaurant?"
“Maura is friends with the entire homicide division and has the respect of the entire Boston PD,” interjected Jane. “Let me also remind you her father is a mob boss. Do you honestly think this would be the fastest way to punish some assh-”

"Jane Rizzoli, you are one sassy sentence away from turning this conversation into an interrogation."

The prosecutor raised a red taloned finger and waved it back and forth in front of the detectives.

"Inappropriate as her interruption seemed, prosecutor, she is correct. Being stood up is a humiliating experience but Dr. Isles is not known for her emotional responses. I would wager she is the least likely person in this entire building to exact revenge for a romantic slight.” Her lawyer leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms.

"But if she were to engage in such unusual behavior,” he continued, “I would agree with Detective Rizzoli. There are enough people who care for Maura who would provide far more painful forms of revenge with or without her urging. Using a blurry security tape to vaguely implicate this gentleman in a meandering murder case is possibly the least effective form of payback we could all imagine.”

The prosecutor let out a sigh. "All right. Did you at any point that evening go to find this man?"

"I did not. I went to Jane's house for a few hours and then went home to speak to Mrs. Rizzoli. Then I went to bed.” She waved her hand in front of her. "Yes, I understand the two people who had been with me or my friends would be willing to lie but you have my EZPass records, the GPS on my phone, and perhaps my own good word that I did just that."

The prosecutor rubbed her pear-colored forehead. “Dr. Isles, you leave me the uncomfortable task of attempting to question this guy based on a few seconds of videotape identified by you, the only person here who has met him and who has reason to have a grudge against him. We also have the small problem of your appearing to pay for his journey to Massachusetts to murder a man in a dentist’s office. The defense is going to say the entire investigation is tainted due to your association with the department-"

More heard the detectives behind her start to talk and cut themselves off in a frustrated grunt. Her lawyer did his job once again. "I am certain every member of the police department is willing to swear under oath they had no idea any part of this case related to Dr. Isles.”

"I know. But a jury might not accept that. I'm going to have an outside investigator review the evidence prior to trial and bring in another pathologist to check Dr. Isles’ work."

Maura almost banged her hands on the table. She made do with a light tap that nonetheless sent the metal ringing. "No. Absolutely not. There is no way I'm letting either that drunk Russian or incompetent from Worcester touch any part of my lab ever again. And remind you the last time we had somebody overseeing our investigation they ended up being part of the crime and contaminated the evidence irrevocably?"

The prosecutor put up her hands in a gesture attempting to settle down at the now thoroughly riled room. Maura could imagine the row of balled up fists attempting to keep themselves from saying what Maura had allowed herself to blurt out. She appreciated the restraint.

"I will personally vet anyone who comes in and we all are on the same side on this one. There is such a paucity of evidence that I need to make sure every scrap is squeaky clean. As for pathologists, I know a handful who aren't from Massachusetts who I can call in as a favor.”

The prosecutor shook her head. "In the meantime, put this investigation on hold, though I'm not pulling any of you off the case because I actually trust you.” She stood up and straightened her suit.
"And may I recommend, Dr. Isles, finding a local, long-term partner so that you do not end up in this predicament again?"

Maura heard Jane coughing and more felt herself flush as the prosecutor whirled on her stiletto and strode out the door, followed by Maura’s lawyer. Her chair was quickly filled by Jane who reached over and grabbed Maura’s hands tightly. Before she could say anything, the door banged open again and they all saw Frankie walk in, holding a small folder, followed by the chief.

"Not his type," Frankie said with derision. "Who wouldn’t want to sleep with a brilliant, super – hot doctor?"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Frankie," said Jane, whirling around at him squinting her face. "Show some decorum."

“No offense, Dr. Isles,” he said, a little sheepish.

"None taken, Frankie. Thank you for your kind appraisal." Jane squeezed her hands a little tighter. Maura looked down, concealing her blush once more. "I can't believe I fell for this. I can't believe this guy used me for airfare so he could come to Boston and attempts to extract osmium from Mr. Lauren. I feel so stupid."

"Remind me to tell you about Mary Louise Panzereno and all the ways I tried to get her to prom,” said Frankie with a pained look that resolved to a smirk.

Jane slumped her head. "Oh God. Ma almost killed you when she found out how much you spent on flowers and jewelry. You even got her a limo."

"And she put on the jewelry, wore the flowers, and took Alfonso Nuniatto instead. In our limo. I ended up having to take my cousin Ernestine. She has a giant mole right in the middle of her forehead!"

The chief sighed and pushed Frankie farther into the room, then closed the door. “You have the department’s full support. I trust Prosecutor Soon when she says she’s going to find a sympathetic set of qualified eyes. If it means protecting you and nailing this ass, we will all learn to deal with extra scrutiny.”

“Here’s what I don’t get,” said Frost. “How the hell did some slob who never left Massachusetts meet up with some doctor who lives in the deep South. And how did some deep South doctor end up doing surgery in a dentist’s office in Boston?”

“Oh,” said Frankie, putting the piece of paper down on the desk. “They’re cousins. As for the second question, he’s broke.”

Jane dropped Maura’s hands and she felt a sense of loss. She wanted that touch more than ever right now especially when things were so vulnerable. But Jane had to do her part, which was to pick up the piece of paper, glance over, and then wave it threateningly at her brother.

“Frankie, where the hell did you get this? You go snooping around when we don’t have a warrant. This is going to prove…”

“I didn’t do it,” he said slowly and calmly. “I mentioned to Ricky in accounting that he might want to double check Mr. Lauren’s family tree because I heard a name come up during interrogation. And I also suggested may be should call a friend of a friend who knows a guy…”

“Oh my God,” said Jane. “None of us are hearing this.”
“I assume there will be a legal way to locate this information that will show no trace of your involvement, Mr. Rizzoli?” The chief sounded calm but Maura could see the edge of his eye began to twitch.

“Absolutely. I even made sure it was done legally. You don’t need a warrant to find bankruptcy proceedings and you certainly don’t need a warrant to go onto one of those genetic tree websites and do a little searching.” Frankie gave a massive grin. “Every one of us in this police department would take a bullet for you, Maura. A good number of us might lie under oath, but not me because I don’t like lying to God. Both Jane and you have taught me you don’t win cases by breaking the law. Putting a fingernail near the line, ma-“

“Out. Enough, Frankie. Get out,” said the chief. The young man gave a quick salute and scrambled off the room.

Maura took the sheet and looked through it. “These do appear to be public records and yes, William filed for bankruptcy six months ago. Without further records it will be difficult to know how that came about.”

“Well, however it happened, he was looking for a way to make some cash. His similarly bankrupt cousin calls him because hey, a doctor is a doctor,” said Korsak.

“And he has the perfect excuse,” growled Jane. “A quickie with a doctor who he figures will be too humiliated to admit she was stood up…he comes in, digs out the balls, and they plan to split the money.”

“But why do this in a dentist’s office,” Maura asked. “That is what has been puzzling me from the beginning. A surgery of this magnitude would have required equipment far more complex than that used by a simple dentist. Even a pathologist would know this. It would have required sterile tools, anesthesia equipment, and recovery room,” she waved her hand in front of her.

Maura blinked a few times and then breathed in. "Of course. Of course. Oh no, I reached premature closure at the beginning of this case when considering motive and application. I rarely do that but I have been under some,” she glanced quickly at Jane and then look back on the table. "Emotional distress. I am certainly hoping this new pathologist is-“

"Take us with you, Maura,” said Jane. Calloused thumbs pressed against Maura’s palms.

"I've been assuming from the beginning that Mr. Lauren’s death was the result of an imprecise surgeon operating with subpar equipment. I believed that severing the iliac artery would have been the result of anesthetizing someone without the benefit of a paralytic agent. I believed the death was accidental." She felt a little flush of anger. "Now that I know William is involved, I have reconsidered. Mr. Lauren walked into that room believing he would leave lighter and richer than when he walked in. William may have had other plans.”

Korsak picked up the thread immediately. “Ralphie boy saw bright lights and shiny equipment, figured this was what surgery looked like, and let them knock him out. One slice later…no more Ralph.

A chill went through Maura. Yet again, she had found herself in the bed a stone-cold killer, and the doctor at that.

"I think you’ve got it, Maura,” said Jane. "I love how your mind works.” The two women looked at each other and both froze as the words came out.
"And I love," said Maura, attempting to defuse emotional tension, "that you are all such skilled investigators and are able to support my work."

"Yes. That is exactly what also I love," said Jane, floundering. "And I love how…supportive we are of each other. Right guys?" Her eyes danced frantically among the men.

"Are we all going to hug it out now," said Frost. "If so, dibs on not hugging Korsak."

"That's enough." The chief waved his hands at them and opened the door again. "You all figure out if Lauren and William were in contact beforehand. I bet the subpoena for the phone records is finally come through. I like your theory, Maura, but it still doesn't explain how this guy gets thrown out a damn window."

Jane scooted back on her chair and poked her head around the corner of the door.

“Hey. Frankie. You have that report?”

Heavy footfalls were her answer as Frankie returned to the room with a handful of documents. “Getting my workout today,” he said in a huff, then shoved the paper into Jane’s hand. “It confirmed what you suspected. The contractors are involved in a lawsuit along with six other businesses. Turns out the sealant they’ve been using for the windows is faulty. There have been almost a dozen cases of windows popping out under pressure.”

“What was the weather like the day of the murder,” asked Jane. A few taps on her phone later, Maura answered, “Cloudy, 54F, with wind gusts up to 40MPH.” She exhaled.

“Maybe he wasn’t thrown, in other words,” said Frankie. “Maybe he fell out of a window with bad glue. Just like me,” accused Frankie. “And that football.”

“They didn’t finish the extraction,” observed Frost. “You’d think they would do that before dragging him into the side room.”

“Right. They,” said Jane, tapping her fingers. “This is a three man gig. Ralph the mule, one on the inside who knows about the osmium, and Billy-Bob the murdering doctor to do the deed.”

“We determined Mr. Lauren was the person who decided to transfer the content of his abdomen to an outside buyer instead of Migliacci,” said Maura. “Regardless, I don’t see how this is pertinent to Detective Frost’s comment. The logical course of action would be to exsanguinate Mr. Lauren, then extract the metal.”

“Ralphie boy was passing the metal to someone else, remember? The third person we saw on the camera who was probably in the room when they decided to do this murder-surgery. Murdery?” Jane shrugged. “Probably not a doctor. Probably someone who would be freaked out by a five foot high Old Faithful blowing out of this guy’s stomach and spattering the ceiling.” At the mere mention of such a sight, Frost’s dark skin took on a bit of pallor. “I doubt William’s buddy took it well. Maybe even pulled a bit of a Frost…no offense.”

“He drags Lauren out into the side room, figuring he can finish up in private, and props a few hundred pounds of schlub against the window.” Korsak was nodding. “They start mopping…”

“And the window starts popping,” added Frankie with a huge smile. The complete failure of a response led him to retreat.

“It’s a nice story but without proof, that’s all we have,” said the chief. “Everyone back out there and get this all in order. Maura, I hate to do this, but…”
“I know, I will cease work immediately.” Her heart splintered as the room emptied, leaving her and Jane alone. Her turmoil with Jane had been mitigated by her professional successes. Now that was being removed, leaving her at a loss. She twisted her ring around her finger, evoking the memory and motion of her father in the chafing metal. Jane put her hand over Maura’s and stilled the agitation.

“You’ve done nothing wrong,” said Jane gently. “I-We will get you back on this case as soon as we can. In the meantime, go home and relax. I’ll be by later to…grab some food.” Jane’s eyes lit with a hint of flame and Maura felt the fear in her recede.

“Okay. Thank you.” She gathered her belongings and drove home in silence, fighting back tears of frustration with a whisper of hope that Jane would be in her arms in just a few hours.

Jane watched Maura leave and let her heart twist for a moment before walking back out to the bullpen. The room looked unusually grim as they contemplated their options.

“I’m sorry, Jane,” said Frost.

“Yeah, me too. Damn, okay, so let’s get back to the theory part…which is a lot harder without her here, I’ll admit.” She wanted to push the rest of the work onto the boys and chase after Maura. No doubt there would be some way to make her feel better, be it sexual or otherwise. They could talk, sit on the couch, hash out the plan.

“Where were we,” said Korsak. “Okay, he falls out the window…and then what? I doubt either of these two geniuses intended to leave him on the sidewalk.”

“Maybe they thought they’d have enough time to get the body, but the cleanup took longer than expected,” suggested Frost. “And…then…,” he said. His boyish face twisted into a confused scowl.

Jane closed her eyes and tried to sneak into the mind of a twisted pathologist. This was a man who, by Maura’s report, had used her sexually and thrown her away like a piece of used tissue paper. A man callous enough to slice his cousin open like a hamburger bun and watch him bleed to death rather than share his money. A man unafraid of the consequences of his actions and driven by greed and power. A man used to getting what he wanted. She reached the end of his perverse labyrinth and snapped her eyes open.

“And then Billy realizes he does have a way to get to the body. He convinces Maura to give him a tour of the lab while he’s in town so he can collect the metal after he knocks her out,” Jane fumbled her cell out of its holder on her belt. “That’s why he’s been trying to set up another date.” She punched in a few numbers and held her breath until the ring stopped.

“Maura? It’s Jane.” She didn’t wait for the inevitable answer. “Where are you?” The name of a small sandwich shop. “Okay, stay there. I’m having an officer meet you. I’ll explain in a moment.” A sputtered complaint. “Maura, just trust me.” A pause, a quiet affirmation, then a question. “Yes, you can buy him a croissant.” Another question. “No, I don’t know if he wants gruyere with spinach or brie with apple.” Another question. “Maura, how the…just get the man a croissant, slap butter on it, and add on a coffee. Black. Caffeinated.” A three-word phrase dangled in the air. “Yeah, same. I’ll call you back in a second.”

By the time she hung up, the other two detectives were putting away their phones as well.

“I’ve tripled lab security,” said Korsak grimly. “We’re not having a repeat of all the times someone
went through the delivery door and ran off with our medical examiner.”

“And I’ve sent a few people to Dr. Isles’ house. That should give us enough breathing room until we can put a formal BOLO on this guy.” Frost clenched his fist in an uncharacteristic display of frustration. “I really wish we had something more concrete on these guys. Right now it feels like we’re punching in the dark.”

The fury Jane reserved for those who hurt Maura boiled in her chest. “We need to start punching harder. Drag in all those geeks who are using black market metal in there and separate them. One of them will start talking.”

Korsak eyed Jane. “You need to go and check on Dr. Isles?”

Jane wanted to. She needed to. She needed to be in her car, sirens screaming, until she was in Maura’s house. Then she would wrap Maura up in her arms and shoot anything that came near the window, from William the murderer to the Arnold the mailman. But then Jane realized this was what Maura had alluded to at the restaurant. If she wanted to show Maura that loving her wouldn’t mean being afraid all the time, she had to do the same thing.

“No, I need to haul in each one of these idiots and make them regret the day they learned their periodic tables.”

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An hour of posturing and fury later, including one quick and barely reassuring call to Maura, Jane found herself seething across the table from her first suspect. Her gaze latched onto the man in his dull brown khakis, an unbuttoned plaid shirt, and scuffed oxfords. His attempt at casual investor came off as homeless hipster and that enraged Jane further.

Jane spent a few minutes letting him stew in his own discomfort. He’d been a bit baffled and indignant when they pulled him out of his office. He was rapidly sensing this was more than a mere inquisition into the state of their flagging finances. A pallor had crept into his light brown features and he glanced around for legal assistance he had unwisely chosen to defer.

She drew an uncomfortable breath in and out. “So, Anesh,” she said, a bit too loud for the tiny room, “What’s it like watching a man bleed to death?”

He coughed and answered in a dry squeak “Excuse me?” His voice broke and then dropped an octave. “Excuse me,” he repeated.

“I’ve seen people shot, stabbed, fall out of buildings, drown, get hit by cars, and in one case get eaten alive by crocodiles.” She leaned a few inches nearer. “Now, when I saw those things, I was trying to help them. But you?” She let out a pretend whistle of admiration. “You just watched a man die so you could rip him open like a piñata.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said. A few beads of sweat formed at the tips of his greying temples.

“Oh please,” she said, flipping her hand. “Let me break this down for you.” She banged the table with the flat of her palm. “Right now, your two buddies are sitting with my pals. They’re also having this conversation. The question is which one of you is going to give up the other two first. Whoever does that gets to cut a plea deal with the prosecutor.”

Anesh’s dark skin took on a distinctively greenish hue. “And…the other two…”
Jane gripped the side of the table and angled herself forward. “The other two get to go in front of a jury and explain how their quest to be eco friendly led to international smuggling and murder. Luckily enough, people in Massachusetts are so into recycling that you still might be found innocent.”

His eyes looked hopeful. “Really?”

“No,” said Jane, throwing her hands up in the air. “Are you out of your mind?” She could envision a handful of geeks slinking around MIT who might buy into this kind of logic, but they were also the people most likely to duck out of jury duty due to hacking the numbers machine or whatever. “So, what’ll it be, Mr. Ramachandran?”

He bent his head towards the table and began whispering something that sounded like a prayer for some calamity to swallow him up at this very moment. Alas, the only calamity he would experience in the near future was Jane Rizzoli.

“We were trying to do the right thing,” he said miserably.

“Good Lord. On what world does doing the right thing lead to a man bleeding to death in a dentist’s office while you stand there, trying not to vomit on your shoes?”

“He said Ralph would live,” moaned Anesh, not looking at the detective. “He said it was a simple operation and that he had all the tools he needed. All I had to do was hand him equipment.”

“And you believed him,” shouted Rizzoli, towering over the grimacing man. “Haven’t you ever watched Grey’s Anatomy? Did you think he could accomplish surgery with just a scalpel and a pair of bar-be-que tongs? Hell, don’t you manufacture this stuff?”

“No. I’m in the synthesizing arm, not the instruments sector. We do chemo, theoretical chemistry. Things that are supposed to help people.” His expression was pleading and his voice strained. “This is the opposite of what we wanted, Detective Rizzoli. You have to believe this. We are trying to save people, not kill them.”

Jane was not in the mood to be compassionate, not when her beloved’s life was in danger and especially not when the rationale so thready. “Then why didn’t you turn yourselves in after he died?”

Anesh rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands. “Bill convinced us this was for the greater good. One life sacrificed for many others.”

“I’ve seen the Wrath of Khan and I can say Willy is no Spock. This was a cash grab.”

“We were under so much pressure,” said Anesh. His voice had begun to quaver. “Dr. Roginsky told us either we came up with a workable solution, including sourced materials, or he’d cut the whole project. We spent twenty million dollars developing this, most of it our own money, and that crazy dentist was ready to throw it all away. In that moment, one dead handyman seemed acceptable.”

Rizzoli bent over him and growled near his head. “How about one dead medical examiner?”

His head bounced upwards and Jane had to pull back to avoid a bloody nose. “What, Dr. Isles? No, no. Bill said he had a connection with the forensic office. He said…he said she wasn’t smart enough to keep him from what he wanted.”

Jane wanted to take this man and beat him with a chair until both were in pieces. Then she wanted to take pieces of the chair, find William Fournier, and eviscerate him in the same way he had Ralph Lauren. She resisted bringing up Maura’s parentage to scare him. Jane Rizzoli was scary enough.
“Maura – Dr. Isles – is smarter than both of you in ways that would make your nose bleed. Your plan hinged on her being criminally negligent, yet I don’t see his body falling out of the window of the path lab.”

His terror was interrupted by a moment of puzzlement. “I thought it was in the basement.”

“It is,” snapped Jane. Then she leaned in again. “How do you know that?”

“Bill said he could get inside the pathology lab for the metal after the autopsy. We were supposed to meet him tonight to take the metal to Migliccaio.” He looked defeated. “I wasn’t supposed to let anyone know that.”

She slammed him on the shoulder once. “Congrats, Mr. Ramachandran. You’ve just added conspiracy to commit a crime onto everything else.” Then she pulled a pad of paper from the side of the table and slide it in front of him. “I want everything. Names, times, what the plan was for tonight, oh, and how the hell that man fell out of a window. Then you’re going to call Fournier and tell him everything is still good to go. If he doesn’t show, we’ll slap witness tampering onto it.”

He fumbled with the pencil and began scrawling. Before she left the room, she said, “Sacrificing a life for the greater good requires more reflection than any of you could hope to achieve. And that’s one more reason Maura is superior to you.” Then she stormed out.

The trio of detectives met in the conference room with the chief and the head of precinct security.

“Our stories corroborate,” said Korsak. “And for all their intellect, none of these are criminal geniuses. I doubt they agreed on where to order lunch today, let alone get their stories straight.”

“You think the threat is credible,” said the chief. He had not-so-discretely popped a handful of Tums before they walked in and he appeared to be fishing in his pocket for more.

“It fits with the profile of our possible killer, yes,” said Jane. “The only way for him to get paid is to get the metal and the only way to get the metal is through Dr. Isles.” The rage she had directed at Anesh had yet to subside. The more she thought about it, the more she wanted to kill everyone named William in the state.

“Does Maura know this,” asked the chief.

“We briefed her on the situation, yes,” said Frost, keeping Jane in check with a glance. “She’s accepted police protection and wishes to aid in his apprehension within the bounds of her suspension.” He felt the eyes of his colleagues on him. “Her words, not mine.”

The head of security nodded. “The goal will be to secure the lab while making it appear fully functional. We’ll shuffle the regular staff out and replace them with undercover officers. Then, when he’s there, we arrest him.”

“For what? Walking into a lab? Looking for a woman he dumped at a sushi place,” snarled Jane. “This guy can bob and weave his way out of everything, especially since we have zero evidence tying him to this crime besides a grimy tape and the word of three terrified nerds. One lawyer later, he’s out the door.”

“There is an alternative,” said Korsak. “He believes he can do this because he’s better than Dr. Isles. She could prove him wrong.”

“Bait? You want to use her as bait?” Jane never wanted to punch Korsak before. Smack him in the back of the head, maybe. Poke him in the beer gut, sure. But fist to face? This was the first time she
wanted that.

“In the past, Dr. Isles has been willing to put herself in danger to help us with a case.”

“Yeah, and the last time, I shot her father and an FBI agent almost died,” snapped Jane. She stepped away from the table in an effort to prevent an act of sudden violence towards her long-term partner. “And historically, showdowns in the path lab have gone poorly. Do you remember the last time Frankie almost died, and, oh, I shot myself?”

Korsak put his hands up in front of him. “It was just a suggestion, Jane. But I will recall a conversation we once had about not protecting people who don’t necessarily need protecting. You don’t have to save everyone from themselves.” Jane fumed at him and did her best yogic deep breathing to keep quiet. Two breaths in and she was more angry than when she started.

The chief looked conflicted. “She’s been kidnapped out of that lab once. A full complement of officers, including snipers, might be enough to…” He rubbed his forehead. “I can’t believe I am seriously thinking about putting snipers in a morgue.”

“Dr. Isles would kill you if you ruined her equipment,” said Frost. “As well as contaminating evidence with new bullet fragments.” Furious faces caused his jovial tone to recede. “It should be up to her.” He pushed his cell phone to the middle of the table. “Why not ask her?”

Several hours later, Maura stood in front of a pacing Jane inside the lab. The prosecutor had howled in protest at Maura’s reentering the autopsy before another expert had gone over the case. Four people in white suits took extensive photographs before allowing Maura to walk in the door. Now the room was crowded with enough firepower to begin and end another Boston mob war.

“I still want you to reconsider,” said Jane. “We could set up Skype. Maybe speakerphone. Maybe a hologram of you, like they have in Logan Airport.”

“The airport hologram is a TV screen shaped like a person, Jane,” said Maura patiently. God, Jane loved that voice. “Holographic technology has not progressed beyond making 2D images poorly rendered in space. There have been several discussions about the feasibility of true holograms, but right now we are limited to clumsy simulations with 3D glasses.” And Jane loved the explanations, but as usual the timing was wrong.

“You can just say it’s a bad idea without the science fiction, Maur,” said Jane and forced a scowl. “I don’t watch any of that stuff. It makes my head hurt.”

Maura’s laugh was as nervous as Jane felt. The plan involved Maura convincing a man who might kill her to instead reveal his master plan and confess a murder. Given how enthusiastically he had replied to her text inviting him to the lab, he didn’t suspect he was walking into a trap. Except if he did, and walked in with a gun, he would force the accumulated officers to shoot him and leave Maura on the hook for a crime she didn’t commit. Jane hated this plan. Everyone hated this plan, except for Maura, who found the danger a spicy adjunct to her mundane life. She had agreed and been driven in a nearly presidential caravan of police vehicles to the station.

Jane’s quip on what took her so long died when she saw Maura walk in. The goal of William’s visit was to seduce and trick another doctor. Maura made herself a target of seduction, albeit a professional one. Her makeup was a hint darker, her shirt a half-size tighter, and her heels an inch higher than what she would wear to the office. Breathtaking and irresistible. Jane swallowed hard and mumbled a hello instead. Then their massive escort went to the lab and set up around the room.

The three scientists had been released to pick up their quarry, the GPS trackers on their phone
feeding directly to the BPD’s computers. According to the boys upstairs, the group was on its way in a nondescript grey minivan. They were about fifteen minutes away and Jane still hadn’t left Maura’s side, much to the doctor’s consternation.

“Jane, this will not work if you are hovering,” said Maura. She fidgeted with her palms and took a step, then reset to the middle of the room.

“I’m not hovering. I’m preparing you for a sting,” mumbled Jane, sweeping her eyes over Maura’s body. God, she was beautiful.

“And there are no family members here for you to shoot, so this one will go better.” Maura’s voice implied a joke that Jane had no interest in making.

“What ever,” said Jane. “You know the signal? Anything goes wrong, you just…call for help. No special words. No nothing. You are the most precious thing in this room.” She leaned in for what she hoped others would believe was a platonic hug. “The most precious thing in my life,” she whispered. And gods, she meant it.

“More than 50kg of osmium,” said Maura in her flat, conversational tone. “I suppose based on market value, the cost of my education, and the money I have in investments, I might approximate that, yes.” Her words did not match her body, which pressed into Jane and sighed deeply. “I am prepared.”

The lab clicked into darkness and Jane receded into the background next to Frost and Korsak.

“She’s going to do fine, Jane,” said Korsak. “She’s a pro at talking people into a corner.” His jocular tone was balanced by the intensity of his gaze down his gun.

The rumbling of a muffler near the end of its lifespan signaled the arrival of their quarry. “Game’s on, everyone,” said the chief into his radio. “Let’s get it done and go home.”

Jane was not sure what she expected of William Fournier. The man who strolled into the room was average in every way. Not as good looking as Roginsky, that was for sure, and not Maura’s type based on history. What had he said, what had he done to lure her?

“Maura,” he said, and smiled. “I was wondering when you would realize the error of your ways. Women like you rarely get a second chance.”

“Two sentences in and I already want to shoot him,” she breathed to Frost. She felt his head nod and then an elbow in her ribs to keep her silent.

“I apologize for the ways I declined your invitation. My fear of disappointment clouded my judgment.” Maura tilted her head down. “I am glad you decided to come.”

“Then I hope you’ll make it worth my while.”

He reached out and pulled her into him, pressing her into a kiss that she failed to resist. Blood thundered in Jane’s ears. Mine, it roared. You don’t touch her, it screamed. She clenched her gun and her teeth equally.

“Easy, Jane,” said a voice in her earpiece. “She’s still calling the shots.”

Maura had dodged away and was now orienting herself with her back against one of the tables. It was fetching pose, a come-hither tilt of the head, a soft arch of her body that allowed both an ample view of her and a clear shot for the panel of officers.
“I prefer not to confound the working environment of my lab with matters of the flesh. Well, living flesh.” She chuckled. He did not.

“I would say that you owe me for the time I’ve had to spend chasing you.” His voice became darker and his posture more imposing. He took a step closer and Maura took a step back, grabbing a folder and placing it in his confused hands.

“I will owe you much more for the assistance you promised me,” she purred. She made sure to brush his wrist with her fingers, then grip the table behind her.

He made a show of flipping through the documents. “Odd case, I agree. And you said there were some unusual findings?”

“Metal of an indeterminate source seemed to be in his body. We think…well, I think…they were the source of his death.”

“Bioactive or bioinert,” he said. “Inert, I would assume. If there was surgery to remove them and he was still walking around, whatever was in there couldn’t have harmed him too much.”

“But surgery isn’t typically fatal,” she said. “We’re both forensic pathologists, but uncomplicated foreign body removal doesn’t give us our business.”

“You would be correct. I’ve come across various examples of gross incompetence but nothing as strange as this.” His slim eyebrows knitted together and he dug out a picture. “Obviously deliberate. Look at how clean those cuts are across the iliacs. Very cunning. Must have bled out in moments.” Then he tossed the folder on the floor.

“Maura, you don’t need to play coy with me. We both know why you’re here and it has nothing to do with this autopsy.” He moved closer and Maura ran out of room to maneuver. “You’re going to give me what I want.” One hand pressed Maura into his body while the other began its unwelcome journey up her side.

To Jane’s surprise, Maura leaned forward as if to kiss him. He smirked as her lips brushed his cheek and she said something.

“You bitch,” he snarled and pushed her away, causing her to stumble into autopsy table. She let out a strangled gasp as she caught herself on the edge, the metal edge digging into her abdomen as she grappled for a handhold. The motion of his arm suggested her face would be his next target, but the lights of the path lab switching on and blinding him staggered his approach.

The chorus of freezes and threats of imminent violence drowned out Jane’s own expletives. A veritable pile of black body armor encased the howling man and dragged him out of the lab before Jane could deliver the verbal and physical beatdown he deserved.

She rushed up to Maura and enveloped her, not caring at that moment who might interpret or misinterpret her gesture. “Are you okay,” Jane whispered. “Did he hurt you?”

Maura reciprocated and then squirmed out of Jane’s grasp, her introverted nature kicking in. “Just my pride.” She tossed a disdainful look at the retreating conglomerate of officers and subject. “I cannot believe I let him talk me into sleeping with him.” She waved off Jane’s approach. “I’m fine.”

“What did you say to him,” asked Frost, sidling up to Jane. “He went from cold to on fire in a split second.”

“Oh, the autopsy reports didn’t mention surgery or transection of the iliac arteries. He filled in those
details himself.” She smiled. “And I mentioned a metal, not osmium. Plus that picture he was waving around wasn’t even from this autopsy. It was from a case we solved three years ago.”

Her gaze flickered to the floor, where the folder spilled its content onto the scuffed linoleum. “He entrapped himself as well as he did me.” Before Jane could protest, Maura was already being led upstairs by another contingent of officers. She swallowed her rage and followed suit.

Jane sat with Maura on the couch, working their way through their third plate of food. Mrs. Rizzoli had taken it upon herself to feed the entire police escort that had guarded Maura. When the two of them returned home, she had not yet stopped her frenzy of cooking and swearing.

“Puffed up important ass,” she spat as she ladled another helping of sauce onto the manicotti. “You owe it to him? Seriously? All you owe him is a kick in the pants. Which I hope he is getting tonight.” She placed the tray on the table and indicated it. “It’s still warm. Eat it now. It does terribly in the microwave.”

“Ma,” groaned Jane. “He’s in lockup, not prison. Beating the crap out of him would make Maura look more guilty, not less. And if I eat anything else, I am going to die of tomato poisoning.”

Maura shifted so her knee was touching Jane’s under their shared blanket. “The tomato’s association with poison has a long and noble history. It is a member of the deadly nightshade family and many people in the 18th century believed it was poisonous.” Jane shoveled a forkful of cheesecake into Maura’s mouth to stop the overflow of information. She swallowed happily and took the plate out of Jane’s hands. “Thank you,” she said.

“I for one am glad he’s off the streets.” She packaged up two more plates and went for the door. “But I’m not too upset a few of the boys are stationed here.”

“Ma don’t…” Jane’s voice trailed off as her mother left the house. “Don’t bring plates of food to the stakeout car.” Jane groaned and Maura took the opportunity to move into Jane’s arms.

“Thank you for being so worried about me,” said Maura. She ran her fingers down Jane’s leg under the comforter. “I always feel safe when you’re nearby.”

Jane sighed and tilted her head back, then closed her eyes. “This is what you were talking about, wasn’t it? My first instinct when I heard about Dr. Murderface on the loose was to come home and protect you. I almost shot that guy five or six times during a two-minute conversation.”

“That’s a record, even for you,” agreed Maura.

“I wouldn’t want you to go through this, Maura,” sighed Jane. “Most of your danger comes from your terrible taste in men, but I am regularly put into danger. I wouldn’t want you…” Jane stopped. “What I’m saying is, you…may be right.”

“Right about what,” asked Mama Rizzoli, breezing in and plopping herself down on the couch beside the two younger women.

“Right that, um,” said Maura, looking at Jane beseechingly.

“Right that Maura should...learn to make your cheesecake instead of having you make it yourself.” Jane half-forced Maura out of the couch. “You’ve been cooking all day.” Jane got up herself and walked Maura over to her crowded kitchen. “Okay ma, where do you want to start?”
Jane’s mother stood and walked over to them, then pushed Jane’s shoulder. “Don’t lie to me, Jane Clementine Rizzoli. This isn’t about cheesecake at all.”

Maura grimaced as she began collecting bowls. “Jane was saying I was right about how difficult it is to have her as a friend sometimes.”

“It is not,” shouted Jane as her mother laughed. “I’m a great friend. Think of all the times I’ve come over in the middle of the night for something dumb. ‘Jane, my plumbing’s not working.’ ‘Jane, I need you to change my lightbulbs.’ ‘Jane, I think someone scary is at the door.’”

Maura splashed her bowls into the sink. “I have never called you in the middle of the night to change a lightbulb. These are LEDs; they rarely need changing.” Maura chuckled to herself. “I remember that plumbing one, though.”

“Who the hell flushes pantyhose,” said Jane, gesticulating with a fork. “I didn’t think that was possible. Yet there I was with a plunger fishing control top hose out of your toilet at 3AM.” Her mother continued cackling. “Oh you two…just stop.”

“Jane, you are very lucky to have Maura to put up with you. And Maura, I know you appreciate your friend and all she goes through for you.” Mrs. Rizzoli kissed them both on the forehead, eliciting a pair of complaints. “Now that I’ve gotten you two doing dishes, I’m heading off to bed.”

Jane watched her mother leave the room and turned to Maura, who was still giggling. “And they weren’t control-top. They were extra sheer. I was on a date…hey!” Jane splashed a handful of bubbles on Maura.

“Didn’t your mother say how lucky you were that I was here to put up with you?”

“She has no idea the half of it,” snapped Jane. Then she leaned closer and appraised her friend’s face. “I wish she weren’t here so I could show you just how lucky I feel.”

“Thank you,” said Maura, flushing and turning back to her scrubbing. “I think this is a topic we need to revisit after a less stressful day. I don’t think we can resolve the fundamental fear of losing one another after a tense standoff with…that man.”

Jane decided to soak one of the pots out of laziness as much as actual necessity. How could her mother force dishes on them after an armed standoff? On the other hand, occupied hands made for less traumatic conversations.

“We need to, Maura,” sighed Jane. “I’m usually happy to dodge emotional conversations but every inch of me wants to take you to bed tonight and…” Maura raised an eyebrow and indicated Mama Rizzoli’s departure. “Right, and take into consideration mom will be checking on us constantly.”

Maura dropped her voice. “Think she’ll suspect a good old-fashioned sleepover? I’ve never had one of those.”

“You want a pillow-fight, 80’s movies, and gossip about boys.” Jane rolled her eyes. “I went to a few. I do not recommend them. But to answer your question, I doubt mom would suspect anything untoward if I spent time flopped on your bed.” She passed the sponge over a whisk and ignored Maura’s attempts to grab it from her for a further cleaning. “I’m still in shock you are accepting any sort of physical comfort from me.”

“I’ve resisted it,” Maura admitted. She sprayed the pots loudly and spoke what Jane was sure were words of confession Maura knew would be drowned out by the sound of water jets striking stainless steel. The blasting stopped and Maura handed over the pot with a final statement and a mischievous
Grin. “And that’s why.”

Jane let it slide, at least for the moment. “Then it’s a date. Let me go spend some token time in the guest room and I’ll come up—”

“No, please.” Maura held out a hand. “I haven’t cleaned up. It’s still a mess from…things.”

“Right, visitations it is.” Then Jane dropped the brillo back onto the sink and wandered off to bed.

Maura did a lap around the kitchen, grazing on food in a way she never did. It was as much to ensure Mrs. Rizzoli knew of their lack of subterfuge as to settle her mind.

The thought of quitting her job for something safer had been given a femtosecond of consideration before resolving to never contemplate such a thing again. It would take an act of incredible self-destruction for her to leave the BPD for something less intense. Jane would not want that either.

Being in danger when Jane was there, her gun ready to dispatch another man who would attempt to take Maura’s life, was too familiar. Had Jane been hurt in the performing of her duties, Maura would have never forgiven herself. That was the nature of love, though. Even before, there was that terror.

Could it be amplified more now? Was that even possible?

As suspected Angela came into the house, clad in a puffed flower bathrobe and clopping slippers that were standard issue for every Italian woman over 30. She was unsurprised to see Maura and did not attempt to interrupt her agitation. Instead, she pulled some of the leftovers out of the fridge and began assembling another two plates.

“They’re going to be out there all night,” she said, popping one plate into the microwave. “I can at least provide them with hot food.”

Maura considered her next statement. “Your traversing to and from their cars gives away their positions to any who might wish to harm us. They might be forced to relocate each time you go outside.”

Angela glared at Maura. “Then they shouldn’t be so obvious. Or appreciative.” The two women stood a while in the kitchen until the microwave sounded. Maura sensed it might be time to mollify the situation, though Jane would have been inclined to do the exact opposite.

“I’m sorry. I am on edge, that’s all.”

“Well I don’t blame you,” Angela proclaimed. She found a loaf of Italian bread and began slicing it over the sink. “I’d also be terrified if a man I’d slept with turned out to be a murderer. Again.”

Angela eyed Maura and returned to her blade. “And he might have unknown accomplices bent on harming me for Orion.”

“It’s osmium,” corrected Maura.

“Whatever.” Angela slid the bread into the toaster and turned around to face Maura. “You know what I think?”
“No,” said Maura. She wasn’t particularly interested either, but Angela recognized a captive audience when she saw one.

“I think you’ve been dating with your head instead of your heart.” Angela tapped her temporal lobe, which was not the seat of intelligence. Maura knew the anatomy lesson would be talked over, so she refrained and nibbled on a piece of bread.

“I think you’re so wrapped up in finding an intellectual equal that you’re overlooking everything else that makes a relationship work.”

Maura was miffed. “Mental stimulation is crucial to my well-being in a relationship. I need to be able to talk to my partner and to be understood.”

“I don’t mean date a dummy, silly,” said Angela, hooting with laughter no one else could share. “I mean date someone who has put time into something beyond just being a genius. Someone who can appreciate you for Maura, the woman, as opposed to Dr. Isles. I meant what I said last weekend, Maura.” She put down the food and placed her hands on Maura’s shoulders. “Stop looking for people who only tolerate the remarkable parts of you.”

“You’re very sweet,” said Maura, shaking Angela off. “I should go upstairs. Jane said she wanted to talk to me about today. A bit of a debriefing.” Maura enjoyed the potential dual meaning if they were in a place where they could be sexual.

“Good. Maybe she’ll talk some sense into you instead of perennially rescuing from men who have murder instead of love on their minds. And get some sleep, both of you.” Angela shook a motherly hand at Maura. “If you stay up all night giggling, neither one of you will be able to nail this guy to the wall.” She pushed Maura away and resumed cooking.

Maura snuck into the guest bedroom, where Jane had already nested herself into the blankets and was snoring loudly enough to be annoying rather than endearing. Maura crawled in beside her and elbowed her in the ribs.

“Ow! What…ugh, Maura,” Jane snorted, then sat up and rubbed her eyes. “What time is it?”

“About ten minutes after you went upstairs,” Maura replied. “You snore. I will find some memory foam pillows to elevate your head above 30 degrees, which has been proven to reduce sinus congestion and soft palate collapse in 57% of people who snore.” She made a gesture approximating a right triangle. Jane rolled her eyes and reached over to tap on the lamp.

“We haven’t solidified our relationship and here you are criticizing my bedding,” noted Jane dryly. “Rather presumptive of you, Dr. Isles.” The remark would have been cutting if not for the arm Jane wrapped around Maura’s midsection. “Do I get to change anything of yours? Maybe I could swap out the silk duvet for a set of Red Sox sheets. The ones you get at Target.”

“Those aren’t even cotton,” exclaimed Maura. “They’re primarily polyester. Terrible for the complexion! Hardly durable!” She adjusted herself primly. “If that is what you want, I will find a print that is acceptable to both of us. I am certain I can get bespoke—” A pillow softly whacked her in the chest and face, terminating the conversation.

“There’s your pillow fight.”

“It was a one-sided attack. Hardly a fight. More like an assassination.”

“We’ll launch a full-scale war next week.” Jane sagged into the headboard and brought Maura closer. They sat in silence, breathing in synchrony.
“Was that how he treated you when he saw you,” Jane asked into Maura’s hair. “He insulted you from the moment he walked in the door.”

Maura tensed up and flushed. “He…knew how to exploit my weaknesses. It is not uncommon for brilliant women to doubt their physical attractiveness even when it is constantly reinforced by multiple sexual partners.” She wrinkled the comforters between her hands, then smoothed them out again. “Point out my failings to make me eager to prove myself, meaning that I was unusually motivated to perform for him sexually.” She shrank into her body. “I can’t believe I fell for such an obvious psychological ploy.”

“You’re human, Maura,” said Jane. “No matter how remarkable your intellectual, you’re still prone to the same set of psychological…whatevers.” She waved one hand. “I’ve had guys try to do that to me. Try and talk down to me, make me feel that because I’m too masculine, no one will want me.”

“Does it work?”

“Nah,” she said. “You know me. The things I’m ashamed of no man would be able to pick up in a shady bar.”

“So you’re immune to psychological whatevers,” pouted Maura. “Even though I pride myself in being the more logical of the two of us.”

“Maura, you finish the rest of that thought,” said Jane in a dangerously low tone of voice. “And you will be sleeping alone tonight with your pile of whatevers.” Her voice softened. “I would really prefer you not to.”

Maura slid down under the sheets, allowing Jane to wrap her up. “I know it’s silly,” she said. “I know I should be confident.”

“I will keep reminding you that I love all of you, body and heart, mind and soul.” Jane nestled herself into Maura’s hair and kept one hand across her torso. Maura could hear her breathing slow and knew she’d have to work to keep the conversation going, which is what she needed as much as sleep.

“You mean you’d be willing to give this a try?”

“Your timing is terrible, Maura,” groaned Jane. “Yes, I would, but I think we need to figure out how to deal with who we are. We work in a dangerous line of business and I can’t worry that you’re going to break down if I…ugh, let’s just sleep on it? Please.”

“Of course.” Maura reached down, pulled Jane’s hand up, and kissed it softly. “I love you. Sleep well.”

“Mrph.” And Jane was gone once more.

Maura didn’t sleep. Maura lay awake remembering how William felt near her. Her heart rate had quickened in fear, but there was the excitement she had quickly associated with him. His insults and pettiness should not have reached her. She was better than that. He had intended to exploit her once more. That Jane had figured it out meant she was cannier than William. That Jane loved her so fiercely meant even if Maura didn’t believe in herself, Jane did. She let herself drift off, awakening in a few hours when Mrs. Rizzoli banged on their door to remind them to go to sleep. Then Maura dragged herself back to her own room in a state of fatigued frustration as Jane screamed into her pillow.

It wasn’t how she would have chosen to end her night, but she accepted it.
Jane had woken earlier than Angela expected, especially given the tumult of yesterday and the upcoming interrogation today. Angela didn’t know much about police interrogations, not more than what she saw on TV, so she hoped they turned off the recordings and smacked this guy around until he confessed. Bad enough to murder a man and throw him out a window, but to threaten Dr. Isles? She had half a mind to call up Maura’s crazy killer father herself.

Maura was still absent, having slept through her alarm and now attempting to do an hour’s worth of prep time in twenty minutes. Jane was left to assemble their gear for departure to the station. She threw bread into the toaster and poured a cup of coffee, then sighed as she looked at her watch. Angela was sympathetic. Maura’s ability to be on time was the opposite of her intellect. She’d be late to her own funeral, thought Angela.

Jane seemed more than merely frustrated at being late again. She paced around the kitchen, rubbing her forehead with her fingertips and pressing hard enough to leave red lines across her pale skin. Angela sat at the table, her hands clasped in front of her as she watched her daughter physically and viscerally express her agitation.

In this state, Jane would probably react to any intrusion from her mother rather poorly but Angela couldn’t just sit here and observe her daughter’s suffering. She tried a safe inquiry.

“Is something bothering you, Janie?”

The two of them had not had a great relationship for most of Jane’s life, the product of two hurricane-force personalities colliding in an endless array of thunder and lightning. The last few years had seen their relationship settle to a quiet roar marked with moments of connection. Nevertheless, it must have taken all of Jane’s effort and newly-found maturity to speak to her mother with anything other than frustrated derision.

“Ma. I just need you to listen. I don’t need you to solve anything. I don’t need you to make suggestions or give helpful advice. I just need to…talk…”

Jane gripped the sink with both hands, not facing her mother. She didn’t see her mother’s sharp featured face fall softly and a mouth that had begun to do the opposite of what her daughter asked close into silence. Just as Jane had grown, so that her mother. Mama Rizzoli did one of the hardest things that a mother, and Italian, could do. She remained quiet. In the silence interrupted only by the hiss of the espresso machine, Jane began a confession.

“I always thought I knew exactly what I wanted. I mean, I still do. I want to be a great cop. I want to be a detective in the homicide department. I want to go out into the world, find the bad guys, help the good guys. That’s who I am.” Her fingers ran around the loop of her belt where her badge and her gun would usually sit.

“And that means family and relationships always wind up second.” She turned around and faced her mother, her face creasing into a mortified and simultaneously reassuring twist. “I mean, it’s not that I wouldn’t do anything for you and Frankie. Or for TJ.” She forced a smile. “Hell, I do almost anything even for Tommy, no matter how much a screwup he is.”

She lifted her palms up towards her mother and paused long enough that Angela thought she should probably respond.

“I know. It’s what makes you a wonderful officer and precious family member.” She wanted to add more but willed herself quiet again.
“Yeah. Thanks. I don’t feel like either right now but, well, they haven’t fired me yet and I don’t see you disowning me in a fit of anger. No matter how much I deserve it sometimes.” The smile evaporated as she began running her fingertips along the tabletop.

“I’ve gone along with this whole time and realized, even if I didn’t say it out loud, that having a real relationship always has taken a backseat to what I want to accomplish. It’s not that I don’t care about Casey. It’s not that I wasn’t serious about Agent Dean when I was seeing him. It was just… I’ve known in my heart this whole time I could never put them in front of my work. This was something Maura and I talked about,” and she paused.

“When Casey went back to Afghanistan I was relieved wouldn’t have to make any of these decisions but,” Jane balled up her fists. “I’m having to make them now. Or at least I think I am. I don’t know.”

Angela’s heart leapt. She was fond of Casey, even after he had decided to ruin his daughter’s life a handful of times by running off and coming back and running off and getting injured and running off and getting fixed and running off. The young man was trouble but also amazing. Certainly, her daughter could do much worse than a cocky, successful young officer who obviously loved Jane enough to nearly kill himself for a chance at having a normal relationship. Maybe he was back and she was going to make a decision on whether to pursue him more seriously? No. Angela quieted herself down again. Jane wouldn’t be agonizing over Casey with her mother. She would be agonizing over Casey with her best friend, Maura.

Angela never saw Jane struggle like this except when it related to Maura. After Maura had been nearly killed by Hoyt. After Maura had cut Jane out of her life when Jane shot Paddy Doyle. After Maura been charged with murder and Jane had found her in a jail cell, her face bruised from a single angry punch. Angela felt a thin chill run through her. The falling out after the shooting had been hard. More minor tiffs Jane and Maura had over Maura’s boyfriend Ian, for example, filled her with disquiet. Was this something even worse?

She turned it over once or twice. No. She would’ve seen it in the behaviors of everyone at the café. It was like the entire police station tilted slightly to the left when Jane and Maura fought. She boggled that the police had been able to solve anything for weeks after Paddy’s arrest. This crisis in front of her was a Maura issue…but not the usual one.

Jane kept talking. “I leave the house every day to go up against guys who would shoot me with one hand and drink the rest of their beer with their other. And I don’t know if I could live with myself knowing that someone would be crushed if I died.” She blinked a few times at the illogic of the statement but kept going even if she gave an exasperated sigh.

“I mean, I know you would be crushed. Frankie, Tommy.” Another pause. “Maura.” Jane took a swallow of coffee. “But I mean, someone who I married. It would be different. And I’ve always thought being with someone in law enforcement or in the military would make the idea of my getting killed in the line of duty somehow easier. You know, if they’re used to someone dying it wouldn’t make that big a deal if I did.” Jane looked more frustrated. “But it would be the same thing for me, knowing that person might also go out and die…I don’t know if I could handle that either.”

Angela made her calculations. Jane was here, without her petite blonde shadow. Jane was talking about risks and careers and relationships. Jane was talking about getting killed and not wanting someone to be upset. Jane was talking about Maura. Angela was a little perplexed, as Maura was regularly crushed when Jane was injured or threatened. Why this now?

Angela made a leap she hadn’t ever thought was possible. Angela was worrying about Maura’s grieving not as Jane’s best friend but as Jane’s…girlfriend. The two had turned their deep friendship into something far more physical. Angela was shocked by how shocked she was, then shocked that
she was shocked not at the deed but that they hadn’t done it sooner. She prided herself in being so intuitive and progressive, and here she was! She was easily accepting that her daughter was gay and in love. She figured she should put her daughter out of her circular speaking misery.

“You know. There are still nights when I lie awake wondering if Korsak or Frost are going to show up at my door and tell me that you didn’t make it home that night. And when Frankie decided to become a cop I got to go through that all over again. But that doesn’t keep me from loving you or him. And even though I ask you constantly to take up a different job we both know that you would be miserable behind the desk or as a lawyer…or as a goalie in the NHL.”

Angela reached out and took her daughter’s hands and gripped them together tightly and lovingly. “I want you to be happy. Anyone who loves you,” and Angela said every one of these words slowly and with meaning, “will want you to do what makes you happy, which includes being a police officer and all the risks it entails. You need to do what’s going to make you happy.”

“But what if I’m wrong? What if trying to make myself happy ruins everything I’ve been working for and looking for?” Jane pulled back but her mother clasped her hands a little tighter. Jane didn’t make the effort to break the contact completely. “You know I love taking risks but this is more than anything I’ve ever had to do before. I’m literally risking everything and I don’t know if it’s right.”

“Jane Clementine Rizzoli,” her mother began in the stern, maternal voice she used when scolding her daughter for the most egregious of offenses. “You are the smartest, bravest, most talented cop in the Boston Police Department. If you have put your mind to it, I know you can do anything you need to and do it well. And if it’s making you happy, I love you for it and I will support you.” A wave of relief moved over Jane’s face and Angela couldn’t help adding, “but I’d prefer if it didn’t end up with my having to bail you out of prison. I’ve done that enough with your brother…”

“Ma!” Jane threw up her hands and Angela let her. The young woman seemed relieved. Angela was as well. The young woman paced around the kitchen in an agitated victory lap. Maura took this moment to rush down the stairs and frantically gesture at Jane, who rolled her eyes. Jane went over to her mother and kissed her on the cheek before stalking out of the house while chiding Maura, closing the door behind her in a rush of determined emotion.

Angela rocked back on her chair, then got up and began to bustle around the kitchen, continuing breakfast. The conversation has gone smoothly all things considered. Granted, she didn’t quite know what this all meant. Jane didn’t seem interested necessarily coming out to her yet, but that was okay. Even if Jane didn’t say anything, Angela would have to do some planning to make sure her daughter knew exactly how her mother felt.
The three detectives stood in a cluster outside of the interrogation room, exchanging aggravated looks. Fournier had called in a lawyer and was making noise about entrapment and contamination of evidence. Anyone who went in there would be accused of being tainted by his association with Maura. In addition to his aspersions as to the integrity of the case, he had taken to berating Maura’s intelligence, class, and poise to anyone who would listen.

This meant that Korsak, Frost, and Rizzoli had the unenviable task of attempting to talk down everyone in the precinct who was inclined to defend Maura’s honor with words or fists. As it was, William was insinuating police brutality given the ferocity of his takedown. Never mind that he had assaulted a member of the BPD. He implied should have been escorted in a tutu by officers wearing white gloves.

“Jane, you want to do the honors,” suggested Korsak. “Maura’s your friend and she deserves the best. Not that I’m too shabby.” He pointed a thumb at his younger companion. “Ditto for Frost.”

“But there’s something poetic about your slapping down this guy,” agreed Frost. “Little bit of girl power and all that.”

Jane swore this was something they did just to annoy her. “Girl power again? Welcome back to the 90’s, boys. Time to take out the parachute pants.” She pulled on her pants to prove a point. “I know I can do it but whenever I see his face, I want to drive a bag full of osmium into it.”

“Look at it this way,” suggested Korsak. “Remember when Maura went and questioned Hoyt? She was completely unflappable in the face of that psychopath. You can do the same thing. Get your game face on.”

Jane took a moment to send herself back to that horrible time. She had watched Hoyt posture, preen, and threaten Maura. Her friend’s breakdown had been afterwards, a private moment of self-doubt, but during her interaction with Hoyt she would have made a seasoned interrogator look sloppy and impulsive. Jane channeled the coolness for Maura. A shiver of ice and anticipation, an extra breath, and she began.

She walked in unhurried and inspected William Fournier, accompanied by the same lawyer who had brought in Gregory. That was suggestion enough that his actions were approved by the management, the dentist’s denials notwithstanding. He wasn’t remarkable. Attractive, sure, but not anything remarkable. Jane could have taken a picture of him and sold it as a stock photo labeled “generic guy”. How had he bedded Maura?

The two men tracked her as she pulled out the chair and sat down, placing the folder neatly beside her. Then she folded her hands in her lap and smiled thinly. She channeled her increasing urge to set them both on fire into her feet, a technique she had learned from Maura. Livid toes gripped the insides of her shoes with the force of an orangutan in a hurricane.

After a minute of tense silence, the lawyer leaned forward. “Do you have any questions for my client,” he said.

“Did you murder Ralph Lauren?”
“I plead the fifth,” said William smugly.

“Okay.” Jane stood up, tapped her folder on the table once to order the papers within and went to leave the room. “Thank you for your time. I will have the officers escort Mr. Fournier back to his cell.”

“That’s it,” demanded his lawyer as she put her hand on the doorknob.

“What else would I need,” asked Jane. “This was a formality.”

“What evidence do you have that my client was involved with this case?” The lawyer’s smooth fingers gestured at the papers underneath her arm.

“You will have access to that evidence during discovery. Based on current predictions, the trial will be in fifteen months.”

“And in the meantime,” sputtered the lawyer.

“In the meantime,” said Jane. The removed her hand from the doorknob and slowly turned, repressing a grin. The game was on. “The bail hearing will be tomorrow, where we will recommend Mr. Fournier be held until trial. No judge will look favorably on a suspect who assaulted a well-respected member of the law enforcement community.”

“You can’t do that without evidence,” insisted the lawyer. “You can’t hold a man indefinitely based on simple felony assault.”

“Felony assault when committing another crime, namely evidence tampering, related to a murder. Your client is an out of state resident in dire financial straits. He is a flight risk. We will see you in co-“

“You can’t do this to me,” snapped William. Jane leveled her eyebrows and forced herself to not roll her eyes. “I have rights. I can’t be shoved into a cell like a common criminal.”

“Oh, I agree. You are quite uncommon.” She took one step into the room, then paused. “It is rare a criminal directs his attacks towards a member of the police force. It is even rarer to do so after engaging in a recorded series of threats against that same member. And it is vanishingly rare for said criminal to target someone who is as well protected…” Jane let the word hang there for an extra two seconds, enough to make the lawyer shift in his chair. “As Dr. Isles.”

“So what? Sending some nasty texts and standing someone up on a date aren’t crimes. Pushing someone aside isn’t an offense.” He made a backhanding gesture with his palm.

“It reveals a level of animosity towards Dr. Isles that no judge will ignore. Protecting the most valuable asset the Boston Police Force has on staff is worth the indefinite detention of a man accused of first degree murder”.

He forced a laugh. “Valuable asset? She’s a coroner in a city with a lower murder rate than most suburbs in Texas. Her publications are laughable, her research paltry, and her contributions to the field overall unimpressive.”

Jane used the appearance of being thoughtful to wrestle her rage back into her feet. She’d need to replace the soles at this rate.

“Yet you sought her out for not one but two sexual encounters, going as far to avidly pursue her until she blocked your advances. When she appeared to give you another chance, you subjected her to
unwanted physical attention and assaulted her when she exposed your lies.” Her conversational tone masked the mental chant of “You asshole” playing in her head.

“I ‘assaulted’ her because she accused me of murder,” he half-yelled, slamming the arm of his lawyer back and ignoring the well-dressed man’s imploring for him to stop. “She invited me over, then played head games with me to entrap me into confessing knowledge of a crime. I made a logical deduction based on what I’d read in the newspapers. It was a slip.”

“A very specific slip,” stated Jane. “Even more unusual given-“ She pretended to catch herself. “That is a discussion to have in front of the jury.”

She walked forward until she was towering over the seated man, close enough to put a hand on his shoulder. He shrugged her off with a furious twitch.

“More importantly, that still does not explain your chasing someone you admitted in writing is not your taste. If you were that disinterested in Maura, your only purpose in that lab was to gain access Mr. Lauren’s body.” She caught the eye of Fournier’s lawyer, who was shaking his head with disgusted impotence. In some ways, she pitied him. Not everyone could have Maura for a client.

“Alternatively.” Jane’s voice descended an octave lower. “Your seduction techniques revolve around undermining the confidence of your targets. When Dr. Isles is in Boston, she has endless displays of her competence, which let her realize your technique. She rejected you absolutely, humiliating you in the process.”

She bent closer, the room still and her breathing controlled. Imaging the moment when he had kissed an unwilling Maura filled Jane with righteous fury that she crushed into a weapon to destroy this man. No rage. Only art. Now it was time to drive the blade home.

“In which case, you intended to go to the coroner’s office to violently reassert your sexual dominance over Dr. Isles.” Another pause. “Which would you prefer to explain to the jury?”

She stood up and walked away slowly as he howled and cursed at her. And when he threw a threat of physical violence into the mix, she spun and gave a toothy grin. He sat back down, his mouth shutting in horror, and his lawyer covered his hands with his eyes.

“See you at the bail hearing.” Then Jane walked out.

Her companions were there to rub her shoulders and clap her on the back as she emerged. “Nice job slugger. You rattled him well enough,” crowed Korsak.

“Think he’ll cut a plea,” asked Jane.

“Absolutely,” said Korsak. “If that lawyer is worth his suit, Billy-boy will be singing his confession before lunch. You worked him into an absolute froth. I loved it. Very subtle.”

Jane took his smile for what it was worth, then pulled herself away from them and stepped into the elevator to check on Maura. On the way down, she stopped it and tried to release the wrench tension out of her back and feet. He was disgusting. How he treated Maura was disgusting. How he exploited her was disgusting. Her job wasn’t to protect Maura from the world. It was to build Maura up so she could face the world. That was the ultimate argument she had with herself. Then she triggered the elevator and let it descend.

Maura peered anxiously through the glass of her lab, watching another doctor carefully examine her
pristine handiwork. She trusted the chief when he said he’d gotten her the best, perhaps as an apology for all the times people on the other end of the skill bell curve had sullied her lab. She’d arrived after the start of the autopsy review and observed every action taken by the doctor. No matter how talented, another doctor would inevitably ruin her subtly perfect setup.

The person, a woman based on build and hairstyle, bent over the cadaver, then made vocal notes into a handheld microphone. She walked to the computer, removed her gloves, put on another set, and then typed in something. Maura was impressed by her thoroughness. Clearly this was someone accustomed to lab protocol, including avoiding cross-contamination of lab equipment with bodily remains. It was impossible to completely prevent it but there were differences between large pieces of tissue and whatever fragments floated in the air before being taken up into the ventilation.

Maura’s respect for the woman’s thoroughness was being trampled by her desire for the woman to finish up and confirm Maura’s autopsy findings. It didn’t matter that William was the perpetrator. Science was science, regardless of context. That it would nail him to the wall – as Jane would say – was a bonus.

Jane, her love, her possible mate…Maura tried the word on and secreted it away…had been quiet on the ride over. Focusing on the plan, she said to Maura, meant putting herself into as peaceful and Zen a mood as possible. Maura agreed this was hardly the time for Jane’s usual ferocity and impulsiveness but it left her feeling cold. It was a strange conversion for Maura, who had prided herself in her emotional distance and had preferred solitude. Now the slight distance from her friend made her feel off-kilter. It was love, or obsession, or a trick of oxytocin poisoning. Torn between her desire to stay distant or embrace closeness, Maura instead decided to sit in quiet suffering.

Two miles from the station, Jane pulled over at a Starbucks that Maura had sworn off due to their subpar espresso, which was dangerously poor even for a chain restaurant.

“Jane, why are we stopping? You know I dislike this place. I’d rather have your instant coffee than patronize these…amateurish coffeemakers.”

Jane brushed the side of Maura’s face with the back of her hand. “This is more to tell you that I love you and it will be alright. We’ll get through today. Together.”

Then Jane threw the car into gear and slammed them back towards the station double time. The seatbelt had tightened across her torso in protest. Maura had chided the driver, but Jane instead grunted per usual about Maura’s extended preparation time. Maura concluded it was worth the threat of a hollow viscous injury by restraint device to have resolve her emotional turmoil.

Maura fidgeted with her ring and watched the figure walk back to the autopsy table for one last lingering look. She’d been at this for almost two hours, which was plenty of time to either find fault or exonerate Maura completely. Maura was absolutely confident in her work but that did not mean someone would not attempt to find fault for nefarious purposes. Perhaps this person was looking to make a name for herself by toppling Maura’s empire of pathology. The chief would not be that underhanded, not after she had provided him and the department with so many wins. She had to stay resolute, confident, and try not to descend into a tempting pessimistic spiral.

After ages had passed, the woman exited the lab and went to decontamination to change. Maura laced her fingers behind her back and took a handful of breaths according to pranayama technique. This of course coincided with Jane’s approach.

“Are you going into labor out here? Is there something you want to tell me, Dr. Isles?” Her playful tone suggested the questioning upstairs had gone well enough to deliver Jane here with good news.
“They are a form of breathing meant to balance the competing essences of human nature,” chided Maura reflexively, “allowing me to center myself in preparation for whatever may come.”

“Well, Dr. Isles, you can go back to normal respiration,” replied a clipped female voice. “All you need to prepare yourself for is my praise.”

An African-American woman with jet black hair wore a slightly bemused expression and held a manila folder in front of her. She offered it to Maura’s anxious hand.

“Exceptionally complete and well thought-out. Your notes are clear and accessible to both layperson and scientist, a rare feat in our field. I agree with your conclusions and measurements. As required, I will testify at trial.”

Maura clutch ed the folder to her chest and exhaled once more, which turned into coughing as Jane moved past her and offered her hand.

“We really appreciate your coming here on such short notice. Doctor…” Jane offered one hand to the other doctor. With a furious head gesture, Jane chided Maura to engage in social pleasantries she had neglected amidst her relief.

“Camille Saroyan. But most people call me Cam. Except for my boss, who calls me Dr. Saroyan, because…well, that’s her way of maintaining mental order in a chaotic world.”

“Jane Rizzoli, lead detective on this case. Call me Jane, because, that’s my name.” She rolled her eyes at herself and Cam smiled. “I appreciate your assessment of my colleague’s work. I’m sure you know Dr. Maura Isles.”

Maura nearly dropped her folder as she extended her hand as well. “Dr. Saroyan…” Jane glared at her and gestured again. “Cam. I am a great fan of your work. Your papers on the intersection of police work and pathology, especially when it comes to dueling motives, are very provocative. If you are in town long enough, I would very much like to explore the topic more fully.”

Cam’s dark brown eyes widened in amazement. “Almost everyone who recognizes my name immediately asks if I can get them Dr. Brennan’s autograph. I’m surprised you know my work.”

“Well, Dr. Brennan’s accomplishments are many and I am of course an admirer of both her science and her fiction, but it is improper for me to use you as a conduit to interacting with her when I am fully capable of doing so myself.” Maura grinned, a little nervously. “On the other hand, you are an accomplished scientist whose work I suspect is overlooked by your current colleagues but that I can appreciate as someone out in the field with your subjects…so to speak.” She had enough social training to recognize the minefield she was in but not enough to maneuver herself out completely. But that was what Jane was for.

“What Maura means is it’s a nice change for her to have someone who can talk science with her without needing to break out ‘Forensics for Dummies’. Jane’s grin was unforced. “God, she must be sick of us. One of my colleagues, great damn detective mind you, still gets queasy at the sight of blood. She must feel like she’s in kindergarten.”

“But Frost is improving,” insisted Maura. “I’m happy to help him.“

“But wouldn’t you rather hang out with people of your own kind,” teased Jane. “Instead of needing to debase your intellect.”

She had half a mind to slap Jane with the folder. “You are my own kind,” she fumed.
Cam raised a hand. “Point taken. Maura, I would be happy to get a cup of coffee and discuss how best to wrangle a team into accepting your science.” Her eyes held a glint of mischief. “But from what I see here, you’ve managed to bridge the gap quite successfully.”

Maura flushed. Was her sexual attraction to Jane that obvious to an outsider? Jane had begun leading them towards the elevator, discussing the culinary options available to them courtesy of Mama Rizzoli.

In a few moments, they were sitting around a table while Jane’s mother fretted and fussed over Cam. “I am so grateful you came up here to clear our girl.” She patted Maura’s shoulder and smiled to conceal her almost violent protectiveness. “Anyone who would besmirch her good name-“

“Oh, the hundred dollar words this early in the morning,” groaned Jane, biting into her donut, a spray of powdered sugar decorating the front of her suit. A white handkerchief appeared in front of her and Jane took it, dipped it in Maura’s water glass as she protested, and began cleaning off her clothing.

“Thanks, Korsak,” she mumbled.

The portly detective and his younger, svelte colleague stood over the three women. Maura did the introductions quickly, noting with pleasure the mutual appraisal of the brilliant doctor and clever officer.

“We appreciate your helping Dr. Isles out, Dr. Saroyan,” said Frost, straightening his tie and standing up a bit taller. “This case is built around her expertise…well, and her inability to lie…but we also understand protocol.” He grinned and Korsak patted Maura on the shoulder fondly.

“Jane, once you’re done cleaning yourself up, the chief wants you upstairs. He thought you should be the one to take Fournier’s confession. If you think you can keep from grinning the whole time.”

“Damn right I will,” she said, almost leaping up. “Maur, I’ll be back in a bit. You two girls have fun.” The trio of officers left, with Frost casting a quick glance over his shoulder towards Cam.

Camille smiled and sipped her coffee, politely accepting another cup from the hovering Mrs. Rizzoli. Then she put it down and leaned over conspiratorially.

“There is nothing in my papers you could read that would accomplish what you already have.”

“What do you mean,” questioned Maura. “I am an expert that helps the Boston Police Department. These are my friends, in part because of my position.”

“I don’t think you appreciate how rare this level of camaraderie is between pathologists and law enforcement. You respect them. They respect you. Perhaps being embedded with them so long is why this can happen. At the Jeffersonian, there are more pure scientists. Unconventional scientists.” Cam must have seen Maura’s growing distress. “Not that you aren’t a scientist or that you’re conventional.” She groaned. “Oh god, Dr. Brennan is rubbing off on me.”

“I have encountered those doctors who are adversarial towards law enforcement.” Maura paused. “Your papers describe well the conflict between the desire to solve a case with the desire to engage in pure science.” Maura smiled. “I am lucky to be in a precinct where my scientific nature is respected, though occasionally with some…”

“Desire for you to magic a bullet out of a wound.” Maura nodded. “Tell me about it. But it goes both ways. The people in my lab don’t appreciate the law enforcement aspects of our work. And yes, it’s wonderful to be among ‘my kind’ as Jane so nicely put it, but it’s also nice to speak to someone who
is brilliant and, please don’t take this the wrong way, normal.”

Maura, had she been prone to displays of overt emotion, would have fallen hysterically on the floor. She allowed a wider smile of mirth. “If Jane were here, she would describe a hundred ways I am not normal and, well, if we’re using normal to mean within one standard deviation of the behavioral bell curve…I am certainly at least two standard deviations away.”

“Normal for brilliant scientists,” corrected Cam. “You’re polite to non-scientists, you do not make fun of them for their failings, and you don’t use your intelligence as a bludgeon to make them feel inferior.”

Maura recalled a terrible time where she had chosen her intellectual stature and scientific prowess over Jane’s kinship. She remembered that fight and the thrown insults so soon after the shooting of her father. She’d apologized, of course, but it always stung how she’d treated Jane so poorly.

“And if you had done that,” commented Cam gently, “you’d feel bad about it because you recognize their feelings matter as much as your intellect.” Observant, but she was a police officer after all, and an expert in all things human interaction. “That is a strangely rare gift among scientists.” Cam looked at her watch and sighed. “Which is a topic for another time. Dr. Brennan allowed me to accept this case based purely on its potential association with Miglacci. Now that it is complete, I am expected back in the lab.”

“The art dealer,” said Maura. “We’ve still not conclusively linked him to the murder. As he’s said, all of his actions were legal or so hypothetical they won’t stand up in court.”

“The FBI has been chasing him for years. This is just another link in the chain.” Cam stood up and slipped on her tan coat. “Thank you, Dr. Isles, for the chance to come up here and work with you. I don’t think you realize what a remarkable connection you have with the rest of your team and I hope you never have to find out what it’s like to be without it.”

Maura stopped Cam with one hand. “Wait, one moment, before I forget.” She took her phone out, then took a pencil and jotted a number on a napkin, then handed it to Cam. “It’s Detective Frost’s personal cell. He is an exceptional detective…”

“As well as incredibly attractive.” Cam folded the napkin into her pocket. “Thank you again, Maura.” She grinned and walked out of the precinct.

A few minutes later, Jane came up to her with a broad smile on her face. “We got him,” she said triumphantly. A twitch of her arm suggested a hug not allowed past its mistress’ boundaries.

“He confessed,” said Maura, grin lighting up in surprise and delight. “How did you manage that?”

“A lot of misdirection, a little know-how,” she said, flipping her hand back and forth. “We can talk about that later. Come on.” She tugged Maura’s sleeve. “Let’s go get lunch. Department’s treat. Unless…”

“Unless,” asked Maura.

“Unless you want to give him one last look. After all, you won’t be seeing him at trial. This could be your last chance to stare down the man who stood you up, tried to use you as an alibi, insulted you, and assaulted you. Oh right, and killed someone for osmium.”

She remembered the crazed look in his eyes and the feel of William’s hands on her, both when they had made love and then when he lunged at her in rage. She knew the sting of his hateful words and the insidious doubt he had infested her with. But the outcome had been Jane’s love. Would seeing
him do anything?

The mischief in Jane’s eyes suggested it would at least make Jane happy. That was a sufficient push, though the ability to feel rightfully superior to an awful human being was equally appealing.

She stood up from the table and pushed the chairs back into the table, ensured they were equidistant from each other, and brushed the crumbs into her napkin.

“Maura, don’t give mom competition for her job, especially when we both know you could do it better. All that OCD was wasted on being a doctor when your true calling was organizing the entire universe.” They walked towards the elevator.

“There was a television show about just that,” said Maura. “It was very unscientific in its portrayal of a complex mental illness. I enjoyed it regardless.” She adjusted the hem of her skirt and smoothed her hair in the gloss of the elevator. Retiring to the ladies room to reapply her makeup might also be appropriate.

Jane waited until they were within the elevator to whisper in her ear, making a great show of avoiding her hair, “You look perfect. Why are you dressing up for him, anyway?”

She attempted to match Jane’s smirk. “To remind him of what he lost.” She ventured a kiss on Jane’s cheek. “And to remind you of what you won.”

“The goddamn lottery,” said Jane, taking in a breath. Maura’s enjoyed the rush of arousal at the sound of Jane’s adoring voice. The doors opened and they walked back onto the main detective floor.

The two male detectives met her in the bullpen. “Here to take a victory lap, Jane,” asked Korsak.

“Yep. And letting Maura gloat.”

“Good plan. Maybe he’ll try something even more stupid and we can slap another felony on him,” added Frost.

“I am assuming we are not concocting a threadbare excuse for me to go into the interrogation room,” said Maura. “Unless we want to pretend you left your pen in there.”

“I have a slightly more creative idea. Wait here.” Korsak ducked away as the three of them exchanged confused looks, then returned with a smug grin. He sat on the desk next to his three colleagues as a cacophony of clanks and swears emanated down the hall.

“Did you know that interrogation room was suddenly marked for emergency electrical repairs?”

“I did not,” said Frost with a mock nod of interest. “How coincidental.” His voice pitched up mockingly at the end.

“I agree,” replied Korsak.

Jane looked back and forth between the two men, boggling at their blithe acceptance of Korsak’s lies. “Korsak, did they give you all a handbook called “Dirty Cop Tricks 101” when they brought you in as an officer?”

“Don’t worry Jane. You’ll pick it up the longer you stay around. Now shhh.”

A motley parade emerged from the room. Two officers flanked the scowling, disgraced pathologist,
whose lawyer was trailing behind alternately shouting into a cell phone and gesturing at the blank-faced officers, threatening them with every manner of potentially legal things. As the group came forward, Jane cleared her throat loudly. The four men turned. Jane gave a little wave, but all eyes were on Maura.

She didn’t move forward. She let his gaze draw over her in a way that would have been threatening had she not been flanked by her friends and her lover. She didn’t smile. She didn’t smirk. She instead swept her eyes over him in return as if she were appraising a rotting corpse. Clinically. Powerfully. He was an object. She was invulnerable.

“You bitch. You fucking bitch. You set me up. You are going to regret…” He lunged at her and the cadre of officers tried to drag him back, driving him to his knees. Maura waved them off and though riled, Jane, Korsak, and Frost remained behind her.

She walked towards him, careful to keep out of spitting distance – from personal experience, it was more meters than one might expect – and looked at him.

“You set yourself up. Your technique was inferior. Your skillset far behind mine. While I enjoy my success, you will spend time trying to keep yourself occupied while in prison. From experience, I can say highly intellectual people fare poorly while incarcerated.” She twisted the edge of her mouth upward. “It should be far easier for you.”

His mouth opened to snap back but she had already pivoted sharply and walked back to her friends. Jane’s arms awaited her and she allowed a moment of public affection as she all but leapt into the embrace, then fidgeted out again when her good sense caught up with her body. Maura turned around and watched the snarling man get herded into the other interrogation room. The door shut, muffling his protests, and Maura sank against the wall.

“Nice burn, Dr. Isles. It’s rare to see you bring out the sass,” said Frost.

“It was surprisingly therapeutic,” she agreed. “Now Jane, I heard there was lunch?”

“On the department. I’ll grab my coat.”

Maura sat in her bed, staring at the gilt-edged book. Every night she had been in her house, she had tried to complete Jane’s entry and every night, she found herself stymied. She had spent so many idle moments reliving every caress and stroke. She did not lack for language or desire yet act of writing continued to escape her. Capping and uncapping the pen, flipping through to other encounters, and a bit of mental self-flagellation did not conquer her writer’s block.

A gentle knock on her bedroom door startled her upwards and she snapped the book shut instinctively. Jane stood in the doorway, leaning on the doorframe, and grinning at her in a way that suggested predation. She’d mostly changed out of her suit and now was clad in a white tank top and black pants that showed off her slender and muscular body. Maura did not think she would respond to such a simple visible stimulus. The warmth between her legs convinced her otherwise.

“Is that the book,” said Jane, waggling her finger at Maura.

“It is,” she said with a hard swallow.

“Can I read my entry,” said Jane, widening her grin a bit more. If she had fangs, they would have glinted in the dim lamplight.
Maura gripped the edges of the book. “I…I would prefer…this is a personal…” A red, itchy welt began to form on the back of one hand. “I haven’t been able to finish it,” Maura admitted.

“Hmph,” replied Jane. She walked into the room, closed the door behind her, and locked it.

“I wonder what that means, Dr. Isles. Should we do a comparison?” Jane began to slowly saunter across the room.

“Please don’t ask me to read my book to you,” begged Maura. The laundry list of things she desired, the positions, the most exquisite encounters of her life, were not things she could share even with the woman she loved.

“I’ll make you a deal, Maura,” Jane purred.

Maura’s eyes tracked Jane as she came ever closer to Maura’s bed.

“You don’t use that book to get me to perform.” Jane crawled onto the bed and moved aside the comforter. “And in return, you can ask me for whatever you want, whatever you need.” She began to kiss her way up Maura’s legs, shifting Maura’s nightgown up with every movement, and stopping when she reached the top of Maura’s thighs. “I will give you everything I can.” Maura shivered as the warm lips left her skin.

“Because I love you and your pleasure gives me pleasure.” She maneuvered her body so she was positioned over Maura, her legs straddling Maura’s waist and her mouth inches from Maura’s. “Do we have a deal?”

Maura squeezed her eyes shut and took in a steadying breath. “Asking for what I need is hard. I was taught long ago…”

Jane traced her hand down the side of Maura’s face, across the line of her jaw, and stopped over Maura’s lips. “I know,” whispered Jane. “Consider this an exercise in communication with someone who wants very much to pay attention to your every desire.”

“What if you…what if you’re you?” Maura regretted the words as soon as she watched Jane’s face morph from sultry to offended.

“Do I want to know what you meant, Maura,” said Jane with a scowl, “or is this a seduction technique listed on page 326 of the Great Tome of Maura’s Sexuality?”

Now Maura wore a matching expression of disbelief. “My sexual history is not comparable to Pride and Prejudice. It wouldn’t even rival The Metamorphosis.”

“I would hope your sex life didn’t resemble a man waking up as a giant cockroach.” Jane relaxed and carefully put almost her full weight on Maura. She carefully placed one knee between Maura’s thighs, brushing against the thin fabric of Maura’s underwear. Maura couldn’t suppress the gasp the moment of friction caused. Jane’s face resumed its self-satisfied smirk. “You are interested in my proposition it seems.”

Maura fought her raging desire and rampant annoyance laced with fear. She thought to convey both to her friend, lover, and antagonist yet all that came out was, “How do you know about Kafka’s Metamorphosis?”

In response, Jane moved her leg again and Maura arched. “I did take high school English,” she chided. “You’d be surprised to see just how literate I am, Dr. Isles.”
“Cop dramas don’t coun-oh, my God,” she moaned as Jane slowly drew her thigh between Maura’s legs.

“Now, where was I? Oh right, what do you mean if ‘you’re you’?” She pulled her leg away.

Sexual frustration was beginning to overtake Maura’s logical mind in a very disconcerting way. Never slave to her desires, she found herself anxious to answer all of Jane’s questions as quickly as possible to resume that delicious pressure.

“You tend to mock me as a form of affection,” she said with a pout. “I can easily envision a situation in which I make a request and I am met with a patented Jane Rizzoli comeback. That would be hurtful.”

“Mmm, that does sound like me.” Jane nudged Maura’s knees apart and began drawing shapes on Maura’s inner thighs with her hand. “But I also keep my promises. I promise I won’t make fun of you when you ask me for something. I promise my teasing will be limited to things like this.”

She drew an elaborate series of swirls that Maura perceived as the logarithmic spiral representation of the golden triangle. The ending sweep of Jane’s fingers ran over Maura’s underwear and Maura realized she had lost both the argument and most of her ability to form words. Jane repeated the gesture on the other thigh and lingered a moment longer between Maura’s legs. She pressed her thumb at the apex of Maura’s opening for a fleeting second and withdrew to the sound of Maura’s whimpering.

“Now, Dr. Isles,” growled Jane. “Do we have a deal?” She lazily returned to tracing Maura’s sex through the wisp of fabric between her legs.

“I…consider…this…deal,” said Maura, succumbing to her need, “made…under duress,” she managed. Then she arched her back to give better access to Jane, who used the opportunity to help Maura slide off her underclothing and spread her legs even wider. Maura reached her hand up to grip Jane’s shoulder. “I reserve the right to renegotiate at a later time.”

“We’ll see.” Jane kissed her and slid her fingers across Maura’s swollen, wet sex. She took a maddeningly slow pace, exploring her folds and her clitoris with a detective’s methodical nature. Maura was not allowed to adapt or enjoy any sensation for more than a moment, which heightened her anxiousness for Jane to continue. Maura moved her hips in time with Jane’s ministrations, seeking more pressure on her delicate skin.

The stress of the last few days, even with William’s arrest and confession, still consumed her. Her embarrassment over falling into his trap, the tenseness of the standoff yesterday and today, losing her professional access…albeit temporarily…all of these made her feel adrift, unmoored.

Jane’s nibbling on her neck and rubbing her clitoris were pleasurable but she required something fiercer, more primal. It was unlikely Jane would scry what Maura wanted at the moment, as in the past Jane had successfully delivered to Maura an orgasm with this very pattern. Finding the words within her craving for Jane’s touch was challenging. Dredging them up through her self-doubt was almost impossible.

Jane recognized her lover’s shift in mood, or at least the reduction in the movement of Maura’s body, and slowed her hand. “Is there something you want, my love,” she murmured.

“I…” Maura said. She writhed against Jane’s palm, basking in the sensation while still aching for something more. “I…need…”
“Do you need me to stop so you can form your words?” Maura could imagine how playfully taunting that sentence could have been delivered. True to her word, Jane’s voice was inquisitive without a hint of loving derision.

“Please. No. Don’t stop,” begged Maura. “I just…I need…” She scrunched her eyes closed and let the request tumble out of her mouth. “Ineedyouinsideofmeplease.”

The feeling of Jane’s fingers thrusting into Maura’s opening and curling upwards towards Maura’s G-spot was the first part of Jane’s answer. Regardless of what the literature showed, Maura had long since done her own longitudinal case study and found stimulation of that location brought her a different, equally magnificent form of pleasure. The other answer Maura could barely hear over her own moan of delight. “Of course, my love. Anything you want.”

She wrapped her arms around Jane and pushed Jane’s full weight on top of her body, grinding her pubic symphysis into Jane’s carpals, achieving both deeper penetration and simultaneous force on her other erogenous zones. She lost herself in the rhythm of her longing, gliding along the plateau of her arousal until Jane shifted so she could stimulate Maura’s clitoris with her thumb. That provided the extra sensation Maura required to scale the heights of anticipation and hurl herself off the edge into orgasm.

Panting, Maura opened her eyes once more and Jane looked, well, amused. Then her face softened and she leisurely slid her hand in and out of Maura’s wetness. Maura, post-coital as she was, nonetheless responded. Jane experimented, spreading her fingers while inside, massaging upwards with a fingertip, or coming out almost all the way before entering once more. Maura helplessly rode the sensations, words failing as she gave into her baser instincts.

“Feeling you clenching on my hand is intense, powerful,” Jane hissed. “I want more. I want to possess you.”

Maura allowed Jane to explore her responsiveness, though she felt compelled to add after several moments, “This is so wonderful but I am unlikely to achieve orgasm in this manner. I am among the 75% of women who require direct clitoral sensation to climax.”

“Are you this analytical with all of your lovers, Maura,” said Jane. She had curled herself up on Maura’s chest but now propped herself up on one hand to look at Maura skeptically. “Or is this what happens when I ask you to not do this by the book?”

“You wanted feedback,” replied Maura. “I am providing it, unprompted. I thought that was the purpose.”

Jane’s response was to kiss Maura and trail her mouth lower to flick her tongue across Maura’s nipples. Then she looked up again. “Do you know how much I have been fantasizing about having sex with you again? I need to take my time. I’ve missed you. So. Much.” She swallowed and Maura swore she saw a glimmer of grief dash across Jane’s face. “If you need more, just let me know.”

Then her mouth was done talking and resumed a downward journey until Jane was exploring Maura’s every fold with equally unhurried emotion. Maura didn’t require the orgasm at that moment, letting herself coast and writhe on the sensation as she was adored by her love. Her journal had always been a guidebook towards a desired destination. Now they were on unknown territory and she felt like a tourist who had stumbled onto a place only the locals knew. She hurled her mental guide into the ocean and didn’t wave goodbye. Then she was there again, twisting her love’s hair in her fingers, murmuring words that she would have laughed at had they been said at any other time.

In time, she wanted more, and a simple request led to Jane’s wrapping her tongue around Maura’s
clitoris. Then the orgasm enveloped her and she stopped caring altogether. Nothing less than paradise, nothing more than home, was all she felt.

Jane lay there, waiting for Maura’s pleasure to recede sufficiently to tell Jane what she wanted next. The hardest thing Jane had done was to keep her usual wit at bay and allow the woman she loved to be truly vulnerable. Verbal banter was one of Jane’s signature traits. To have it placed in a box and shoved off to the side was as unnatural as, well, as unnatural as making love to the woman she considered her best friend in the whole world. Making love to a woman at all. And much like this wonderful turn of events, putting away her sarcasm had only led to greater pleasure.

“Jane?” A languid voice asked. “Can you come up here?”

Jane smirked and scrambled her way up Maura’s body to cuddle the flushed and panting object of her affection. Maura was almost purring, writhing her way out of the rest of her clothing that had somehow remained on through Jane’s ravishment. Jane’s hands moved over the pale skin, inspected every freckle, inspected every scar. She was unbelievably content for having kept her clothing on. At that moment, fatigue encroached upon her and began to settle in on Maura’s chest.

Her plans were interrupted by Maura repositioning Jane so Maura was straddling her, unbuckling Jane’s belt with the fleeting hands of a doctor, her face a combination of lust and determination.


The banter Jane would have returned was choked back by the feeling of Maura’s hands ripping off her underwear and the palms of her hands down the sides of Jane’s thighs. Then Maura’s mouth was on her, fierce and demanding. There was no deliberate administration as in their first coupling. This was raw ferocity and possessiveness. Jane succumbed within moments, a cry wrenched from a breathless, parted mouth. A sudden rush of emotion followed a moment after.

She did not cry. She never did after sex. Still, she felt her heart had been ripped out and messily shoved back into place. For all her mother’s and Maura’s talk about losing Jane, she had given the opposite little thought. It was something she pushed out of her mind through professional necessity. Recognizing the mortality of yourself and your partners meant never being able to take risks. In a whirlwind of vulnerability, the professional necessity vanished.

She could have lost Maura. That horse’s ass of a man could have lunged, have brought a scalpel, hell, have brought a gun. That could have been it. Maura against the elevator, a killer threatening to plunge them both into the abyss. Maura, vanished in the arms of her mobster father. Maura with a blade at her throat. Jane had feared Maura’s death before but Jane had never feared the emptiness that Maura’s death would leave. Not until now. It terrified her. An empty bed, a strand of Maura’s hair still on the pillow. A closet overflowing with clothing Jane had no way of appraising. A life without her and no one to fill it.

One of Maura’s fingers twitched at the side of Jane’s face, causing her to look back at her partner. Maura’s gleaming eyes, warm still with shared pleasure, appraised her with loving anxiousness.

“Was that not enjoyable? I had hoped to surprise you with my studies of the bedrock of lesbian lovemaking.”

Jane surprised both of them by burying herself into Maura’s arms. “It was amazing. You are amazing. I love you, do you know that? Of course you do, but you know I like being superfluous. I think you taught me that word because you’re so literate, so smart.”
Maura kissed the top of Jane’s head. “You’re babbling. You never babble. I will take that as a sign of emotional distress.”

“I’m thinking about losing you,” mumbled Jane from the warm confines of Maura’s cleavage. “And realizing I would have no idea what to do with your shoe collection if you died.”

“We’re in a haze of post-coital bliss and you’re thinking about how to settle my estate?” Jane did not have to see her friend’s face to see the exasperated horror on it.

“Maura,” Jane whined. “I’m trying to be…romantic…”

“By discussing selling off my possessions once I meet an untimely end? Notwithstanding the fact that you are more likely to die before I do given your line of work and your dietary habits, I have an exceptional law firm to administer my will, including the exact destination of each item.”

Jane knew the offensive implications of her eating were made to make her feel better by making her feel affronted, which worked better than she would have thought. She pursued her initial line of thought. “Oh really. Your favorite snakeskin boots?”

“Costume shop for underprivileged teens doing musicals.”

“Those grey sandals that gave you a rash two summers ago?”

“Testing lab, then chemical waste dump. Perhaps I’ll do that in the interim regardless” Long fingers twirled strands of Jane’s hair into curled ribbons. “Your point is understood, Jane. I would be lost without you as well.”

The lump of uncertainty and desire in the back of her throat slowly broke apart. She let Maura continue speaking. “But I think we’ve decided to try this anyway. Put away the daydreams of burying me in my Louis Vuitton pumps and concentrate on the reality of being with me, here, right now.”

Jane eased her way up to take Maura’s face in her hands and kiss her once more. As she pulled Maura closer, she whispered, “I will sell those pumps, so help me, to pay for your funeral.”

She did not anticipate the pillow swing knocking her off the bed and hurtling into the edge of the nightstand. The tussle that followed, complete with girlish shouting, provided Maura with the first true pillow-fight of her life. One that, to Jane’s horror, she handily won. Providing Maura’s victory lap was as lovely as it sounded.

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Saturday. Finally. Jane stared at the ceiling in Maura’s bedroom, alone for the first time in many hours. They’d slept in, mostly a euphemism but also a natural consequence of what they had been through. This was the first good night’s sleep she had since that fateful Friday night, albeit punctuated by Maura rolling her over to keep her from snoring. That was endearing for the moment but Jane knew it would get old, fast. Maura would invest in earplugs later.

Now her partner was in the shower, taking her time in the water even though it was far from eco-friendly. Something about a twenty step shower, skin, and hair care routine taking longer than washing and waxing a car made Maura both beautiful and aggravating. Jane had already wandered out to the guest shower, bathed, gotten dressed, and returned in the time it took for Maura to get through her second conditioning rinse. Was this the future she had signed up for when she took Maura for a lover? If so, she could envision extremely high water bills cutting into their mutual salary. With a groan, she swung her feet onto the ground and went downstairs…
…where she walked into a rainbow-covered disaster area.

A party store’s worth of colored streamers dangled in tight curls from every surface that would hold tape. Foil-embossed rainbows were clipped to the cabinets in a way that Jane was positive would ruin Maura’s wood paneling. Three bundles of multicolor balloons bobbed haphazardly against the ceiling, one bunch meandering precariously towards the ceiling fan.

Jane took another two steps in mute horror, where she took in the rest of the décor.

A picture of Neil Patrick Harris in a three-piece suit hung next to a picture of George Takei in full Starfleet regalia, a cartoonish “OH MY” plastered against his lips on construction paper. Freddie Mercury cast his smoldering gaze towards Rosie O’Donnell. George Michael in full glam mugged next to Boy George. A debonair man in a 60’s suit, a trail of smoke wafting from his dangling cigarette, sat in a picture frame, eyeing a ludicrously garish Elton John.

Amid it all, her mother bustled about nervously, thrusting dyed carnations into vases Jane suspected were worth more than her mother was at this moment.

Jane tried to question her mother but all that emerged was a muffled gasping choke. She tried again. Her voice squeaked out. “Ma…what…”

Her mother’s frazzled face peered up from behind the flowers. “Oh, Janie. I thought you two would be occupied a little longer. I haven’t finished brunch.”

“Us…occupied…wait, what?” Jane struggled for a quip but her sarcasm circuits were overwhelmed by the onslaught of color.

“Jane,” sighed her mother, tossing the pruning shears into the sink and walking over to give her daughter a hug. “All I have ever wanted is to see you both happy. You could make a lot worse choices than Maura, that’s for sure.” She snorted and rubbed her stiff-armed daughter’s back. “A brilliant, sophisticated doctor with not one, but two, houses in Boston? I’d marry her myself if I wasn’t done with marriage forever.”

“Mom, what the hell are you talking about.” Jane wiggled away from her mother. “Maura and I…”

“Oh stop. I figured it out when you came to me all concerned about your future love and you being in danger. If it were anyone but Maura, you wouldn’t talk to me about it. You’d talk to her.” She swatted her daughter with a dishrag. “Give your mom some credit.”

Jane sagged into a seat, brushing the balloons out of her way. No sense in lying to the woman who could extract a secret from even the most tight-lipped targets. “And…you’re okay with it?”

“I’m more concerned about Maura. No offense Jane but she’s brought some pretty fancy guys through here. A Boston detective from a humble Italian family isn’t on her radar.” Her mother knew the barb would slap Jane out of her shocked reverie.

“What’s that supposed to mean,” snapped Jane. “No one’s mothers have complained when a guy brought me home.”

“Did they ever bring you home, Jane,” replied her mother with a smile. She splashed a bit of water on her daughter. “Or were you their little secret?”

Jane was finally collected enough to begin ranting. “No, ma, I did meet some of their parents. I even used the correct fork at dinner.” She jabbed her finger at the decorations, changing the conversation back to their currently absurd circumstances. “You decided the best way to celebrate…Maura and I
being…together…was to buy out the preteen birthday section of Party’s Plus?”

“I wanted you to feel at home,” her mother replied.

“By putting up every gay icon from the past 20 years on Maura’s fridge? Who’s that?” She indicated the black-and-white man whose staid, classy demeanor was in contrast to his garish, frumpy associates.

“Rock Hudson,” said her mother smugly. “You didn’t think your mother was familiar with the gay community, did you? I knew about him when you were in kindergarten.”

“He’s part of the gay community like Patrick Ewing is a Celtic,” retorted Jane.

Her mother continued unabated. “Anyway, I looked up coming out parties and thought they were a wonderful occasion for us to get together and celebrate your love.”

“No no. Ma. You didn’t…”

No sooner did the words leave her mouth than Frankie came through the door, dragging a life-sized cardboard cutout of Ellen DeGeneres behind him. “Ma. Where do you want this?”

He glanced over and saw his sister gripping the countertop hard enough to whiten her knuckles. He gave a brotherly nod. “Oh, hey Janie. Congrats. Never figured you and Maura. Makes sense though. She already test-drove one Riz-“

“You are not going to finish that sentence, Frankie,” growled Jane. “Not if you don’t want to pry…” she flailed a hand at him. “Ellen…out of your-“

“Jane. Frankie. Manners,” interrupted her mother. “Put her over there near the table, Frankie.”

Jane ran her fingers through her hair. Humiliation, shock, aggravation, and a discordant love for her mother all mingled into an overwhelming rush that was not what she wanted this morning. She wanted coffee and cuddling. That plan was thrown even more into chaos when she heard Maura’s half-shriek from the stairs.

“My Ming vase,” said Maura, rushing downstairs in a near panic to rescue the heirloom from her mother’s decorations. “Angela, please. I told you not to put flowers in this. The water ruins the pottery. Use the glass one underneath the sink.” She whipped the carnations away as Angela dutifully swapped the water, then took the flowers back.


Angela walked up to Maura and gave her a fierce kiss on the cheek. “I’ve always considered you family, Maura. I’m so happy you’re going to make it official.”

“Make it official? Angela, I’m not sure what you mean.” Maura’s attempt to look shocked was blessedly short enough to avoid inducing hives.

“Mom has figured out we are now dating,” explained Jane, “and she has already prepped us for the running of the brides next fall.

Maura’s confusion and consternation visibly collided with Maura’s love for all things couture. “While I do appreciate the traditional scramble for appropriate wedding wear, I would prefer to have something custom made downtown,” she replied. Then she turned towards Angela. “Do you think
we should both wear dresses or have Jane in a tuxedo? She does tend to be more masculine…”

“Have I fallen into the Twilight Zone,” said Jane, throwing up her hands. “How are you two planning our wedding when Maura and I haven’t even decided what we are…”

She turned off her outrage when she saw Maura’s face begin to droop. She didn’t realize Maura would crave this normalcy even if it was ridiculous. They could iron out the details later. Right now, Jane wanted to make Maura happy. No, she amended. She wanted to always make Maura happy.

“A tux,” said Jane, “but only if I can wear a bow tie and a cummerbund with the Red Sox logo on it.”

“That’s a great idea,” said Korsak, striding through the door carrying a covered sheet cake. “I always regretted not having more fun with my suits. Three weddings later and I still didn’t get to wear my Boston Celtics cap.” He turned towards Angela. “Mrs. Rizzoli, I’ll put this in the fridge.”

He moved in a little more and nodded with approval. “Rock Hudson. Exceptional taste,” he said to Angela’s self-satisfied smile.

“Wow. It looked like a unicorn threw up in here,” observed Frost, walking in behind his friend. “I figured it would need a bit of real color. Here.” He thrust a magazine into Jane’s hand. “Don’t worry, she’s clothed,” reassured Frost as Jane looked dubiously at the glossy print. She opened it and a full centerfold of RuPaul in a magnificent evening gown vogued from within. She peered closer at a black scrawl at the base of the page.

‘Jane and Maura. You better work your love. -RuPaul’

“Frost. Is this signed,” said Jane with widening eyes. “How did you get this on such short notice?”

“What can I say? The queen works in mysterious ways.” He waggled his eyebrows and walked towards Maura, a brilliant grin on his handsome face. “And Dr. Isles, may I congratulate you on your new relationship?” He leaned in conspiratorially. “Camille sends her best wishes as well. And her thanks.”

Jane tentatively moved back towards Maura, who was discussing the personal and professional merits of Dr. Saroyan with Frost. This was insane. The whole thing, from the pictures to the streamers, was so outside the bounds of normal that Jane didn’t know how to adapt. But she looked at Maura, she looked at the future with her, whatever it would bring, and she accepted it. Then she looked at the cake vanishing into the fridge.

“Is that Collucci” she said, tracking the frosted confection with eager eyes. “Hell no, Korsak. Keep that where I can see it. Maura, where is your cake cutter?”

“Third drawer away from the sink,” replied Maura, brushing aside the protesting Mrs. Rizzoli. “I’ll get the cake plates.”

“I thought you would be anti-buttercream, Dr. Isles,” said Frankie, circling the festively-decorated confection with all the intensity of a hunting jaguar. “With all your fancy upbringing and whatnot.”

“There are many things about me that will surprise you, Frankie,” she replied. She cast a sidelong gaze at the cake. “Though it may be a little early in the day to eat a week’s worth of glucose.”

“We can handle it.” Jane popped the top open.

“Congrats on being gay!,¨ crowed the icing in bright purple script, flanked by glossy rainbows on
fluffy clouds. Jane peered closer, where she could see the words, “on your graduation” had been incompletely smeared away by the baker. A minor detail she would mock later, not in the midst of this loving chaos. She would never lose her edge, but there was something about being near Maura that made her want to be more gentle, more patient.

That was put aside when an eager pair of hands attempted to cut off the entire wedge of roses. She slapped it away and scolded the abashed Korsak, who contented himself with a single rose atop an oversize slice.

She took her own piece and sidled up to Maura in the corner. Maura was inquisitively prodding the frosting with the tines of her fork.

“Do you think the person who invented buttercream knew what he would be doing to American patisserie,” wondered Maura. She ran the edge of her utensil down the frosting, peeling it off in an impossibly thin sheet, “or was he some sort of evil genius bent on slowly killing the populace through hyperlipidemia?”

“It’s a conspiracy, I would agree,” mumbled Jane through a mouthful of cake.

Maura’s finger, encased safely in a napkin, drew along the side of Jane’s face, picking up stray icing in its wake. Jane darted away.

“Until you’re my mom, you don’t get to do that.” Maura rolled her eyes. “At least you didn’t lick it first,” Jane continued.

“Who’s to say I didn’t?”

Maura responded to Jane’s mortified look with a lightning-quick kiss on her lips. Then she resumed dissecting the desert with surgical…well, pathological precision.

Jane allowed a moment of uneasiness. “Do you think this will be okay? You and I? Everyone knowing?”

“Would you prefer we each obtain a male partner whose job it is to conceal our true inclination?” She maintained a deadpan expression. “Do you think Casey would enter into a sham marriage with you so we could be together?”

It was only the presence of a large group of people, primarily her mother, that kept Jane from erupting in something more florid than, ”Are you out of your mind?” Then she leaned into Maura’s ear. “There’s no way I’m giving up a single moment with you. I love you.”

Maura’s shy smile was the most precious thing Jane had ever seen.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for coming with me on this two year journey of smut and murder. It has been wonderful writing these ladies and I am glad to have given them the ending they deserve. It's wonderful to write a love story where all the characters aren't hideously emotionally broken. Looking at you Mass Effect, Warcraft, and many others.

As always, I credit my wife Rachel for ironing out the plot points. I also want to credit the Archive of our Own Facebook group and my mom for helping me come up with
gay icons a middle aged suburban woman would know. I didn't know Rock Hudson, which is why he's in there and why Jane is confused. (We're the same age.)

In case you are wondering: Yes! I am doing a Bones/R&I crossover...but that's after I finish my Bones/Buffy the Vampire Slayer crossover and a number of other stories. I'm using this NaNoWriMo to clean house, so to speak, but I'm also studying for my boards. Alas, fictional doctors need to fall in line behind the real one. It may be a while, but anyone who reads me knows that.

Take care all!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!