

Swear To Tell The Truth

Bruce Dooley leaned against the cold marble panel and watched eager reporters and snoopers pour into the courtroom. The day wasn't a typical one at the Calumet County Courthouse. Nothing ever seemed to be normal around the Hollingsworths.

Even though he was there to help Kris, the bartender loathed being around all the stuffy lawyers and arrogant cops. Many days he couldn't stand the place, but today he longed to be scrubbing glasses behind The Blue Streak's bar.

Of its own volition, his face lit as the minute blonde emerged at the top of the stairs, her body sheathed in a curve-hugging jade dress. She handed a jacket to Edward, who came up behind her and stopped at the entrance. Kris moved toward Bruce with a smile that matched his own.

"Bruce!" she greeted him enthusiastically.

He braced himself for the hug he could tell she was about to give. Her small arms slid around his middle with the slightest hint of pressure. "Hi, Kris," was all he could say.

"I'm so glad you're here. I think I'm going to need a friendly face."

Bruce watched Edward gravitate toward the balcony, completely ignoring the gathering witnesses. "You'll do just fine. Get up there and tell the truth, and it will be over before you know it.

The woman took a deep breath. "I hope you're right." She moved beside him and mirrored his position leaning against the wall. They both watched as the district attorney entered the area. "There she is," Kris whispered.

"She looks pretty tough, huh?" Rahne O'Connor walked to Edward and began talking to him. The conservatively dressed woman exuded confidence. And with this case, there was no reason not to do so.

Kris discreetly pointed to a thin, well-dressed gentleman stopped a few feet away from the attorney. "That's her boyfriend. He's a psychiatrist here in town, I think. He must not be here for the case."

"No, probably not. It was nice of him to come, though."

"Yeah, it was. A thoughtful man. Who knew one existed?"

Bruce cocked his head at her and grinned crookedly. "There might be more than one."

The blonde snorted. "Two, maybe, and you're the last ones on Earth."

"I'll take that as a compliment, I guess."

Seeing a tall, leggy, auburn-haired woman exit the stairs, Bruce cringed. He ducked his head and said to Kris, "I wonder how long this trial will take."

"Not long, I hope." The young woman's eyes brightened as she saw a familiar face. "Hi, Heather."

The maid waved and moved to the other side of the balcony near Edward. Bruce looked up at the touch of a hand on his arm.

"This is going to go well. I have a feeling," Kris said, her deep green eyes penetrating.

Bruce was getting a feeling as well. Licking his lips, he responded, "Justice has a way of prevailing, one way or another."

Taking a deep breath, the bartender knew if there truly was justice in the world, the trial would begin soon.



Stuart Hollingsworth took a deep breath and looked over at his younger brother, who was still playing the role of chauffeur until Stuart's cast was removed. Since his conversation with Mark, he'd been waiting for the right opportunity to approach Harris. He hadn't found the right opportunity at home, and the office didn't seem to be an appropriate place since he was acting CEO in his mother's stead. There probably wouldn't be another opportunity to broach the subject, so Stuart decided to risk the possibility of incurring Harris' anger and being made to hobble the rest of the way to work.

"Harris?"

Harris stopped humming to the tune playing on the radio and turned to Stuart. "Yeah?"

"I want to talk to you about something, but I'm not sure how to begin," Stuart said.

“Just open your mouth and the words will fall out,” Harris grinned. “Always seems to work that way with you.”

“Actually, I usually open my mouth and my feet fall in,” Stuart said. “I was hoping to make a break from tradition.”

Harris gripped the wheel more tightly and stared at the road ahead. “Sounds serious. What’s up?”

Stuart sighed. “It’s probably none of my business, but it’s about Mark.”

Harris nodded. “I thought that was what you were gonna say.” He looked over at Stuart. “You should know by now that you’re free to talk about the boys and their problems.”

“Well, I told him I’d discuss something with you, so I will.” Stuart inhaled deeply. “Harris, the kid is upset.”

“About what?”

“About the fact that he feels as if you and Lisa are taking him away from his friends—and his girlfriend—by taking him out of public school and enrolling him in a private one.”

“I know he’s upset, but it’s something he’s going to have to adjust to. Lisa and I made a decision based on everything that’s happened recently, and it’s a subject that’s not open for negotiation. Keeping him in that ridiculous public school is no longer an option. We’re going to have to discuss the details of his suspension with the school board in order to get it removed from his record.”

“I understand, Harris, and I don’t fault you and Lisa for making the decision to remove him from the school. I’m not saying I could do any better or that I’d do things differently, but he’s really upset about not being able to see Tiffany. I wonder if there’s some way around that.” Stuart peered intently at Harris.

A slight smile lifted the corners of Harris’ generous lips. “Where have you been, brother of mine? Mark and Lisa had this conversation a couple days ago. He’s still tutoring Tiffany and will continue to do so if there aren’t scheduling conflicts with whichever school we eventually decide to send him to.”

Stuart shook his head. “I guess the consequences of spending a few late nights at the office are that I get left out of the loop at home.”

"Yeah, but you get to ride home in a limo," Harris said.

"Well, what's the use of having power if you can't abuse it?" Stuart asked.

"Hmm. You know, Stuart, you're abusing your power at the office, working too hard, and losing touch with what's going on at home. Sounds like you're becoming a clone of Edward," Harris grinned.

"Now there's a cheery thought to begin the day." Stuart groaned and sank as low in the passenger seat as the seat belt would allow.



Kris Hollingsworth smiled as Lisa neared, the dark-haired woman's blue pantsuit fitting perfectly on her frame. Sometimes the younger wife wondered what would have happened to her upon entering the family if Lisa had not been there.

"Thank you for coming, Lisa," Kris said, briefly taking the taller woman in her arms.

"I wouldn't miss it," the brunette smiled. "It's gonna be a piece of cake. I hear the D.A. is really good."

Kris shivered as she thought of testifying. "I hope so." Suddenly remembering Bruce standing stoically beside her, she motioned to him and said, "Lisa, this is Bruce Dooley. He'll be testifying today too."

Lisa smiled and took his hand. "One of our heroes. It's nice to finally meet you."

"Same here, ma'am," Bruce answered bashfully.

"Kristine Marie Hollingsworth," a deep voice echoed off the walls.

Looking to the courtroom doors, Kris ruefully saw a uniformed bailiff standing with his thick arms to his side, scanning the lobby. "That's me," she said, still glued to the wall.

"It'll be okay. You can do it," Bruce whispered in her ear, his hand gently grasping her shoulder.

She smiled nervously at him, then Lisa, before peeling herself off the wall and following the armed man into the chamber. Every chair in the expansive room was filled, save one of the front rows they'd been told were for witnesses, and

every pair of eyes focused on her as she slowly made her way toward the bench. The judge, a thin man in his forties with a snub nose and beady eyes, stared at her disdainfully. Kris could certainly understand why people would be reluctant to tangle with this particular magistrate. He didn't look to be in a good mood, and the trial had barely started.

The young woman was glad to have the wherewithal to raise her right hand when asked, despite the swarm of butterflies that was playing havoc in her abdomen. When the courtroom was settled, Rahne O'Connor asked her first questions, establishing Kris' name and role in the incident for the jury.

"Were you carrying a purse that day?"

"Yes, it was a black leather purse. Kris concentrated only on Ms. O'Connor, thankful for her calm, even demeanor.

"How were you carrying it?"

"I was using the strap to hold it off my left shoulder."

"Where were you when the incident happened?" Rahne asked, continually jotting notes.

The blonde wondered if her testimony was going well. She was too nervous to tell. "Edward and I had started walking to the next booth. We were in the crowd and I felt a tug on my shoulder."

"Did you see who was tugging on the purse?"

"No. I never saw him, really." She hated to admit it, but Kris could speak only the truth. Enough others saw Griffith to make up for her lack of clarity.

"Okay, what happened next?"

Kris shuttered, remembering the violence. "He began pulling really hard on my purse and a sharp pain hit my shoulder. I started to spin around. The purse snapped and I was knocked back into one of the booths."

"Why did you fall?"

"The person who took my purse pushed me."

"Were you injured?"

She dreaded this part. The physical intrusion of the incident had been slight, but she still was not over the psychological portion. "I had some bumps and bruises, but nothing severe. Mainly, it scared me."

"What do you mean?"

Kris tried to stem the tide of tears she knew could flow at any moment. "I'm still anxious about being in crowds, wondering if someone is going to do the same thing again. I can't just stroll around anymore like nothing bad is going to happen. It's always in the back of my mind."

Rahne gave her a friendly, encouraging smile. "Thank you Mrs. Hollingsworth." The attorney looked to the judge. "No further questions." She left the podium and returned to the prosecution's table.

"Witness is yours, Mr. Monroe." The judge pointed to the pudgy attorney.

His blond hair thickly slicked back, Reed Monroe stood from his chair, but remained at his table. "You testified that you never saw the person who took your purse, is that correct?"

"Yes, that's correct." Kris swallowed hard and hoped the cross-examination wasn't too rough.

"So it's fair to say that, from your recollection of the incident, you could not point out your attacker under any circumstances?" Monroe asked, his southern accent almost gone.

Frowning, Kris thought she'd answered that question. "That's fair. I didn't see him until after—"

"Thank you, Mrs. Hollingsworth. No more questions." The attorney plopped down in the stiffly cushioned chair and stared at the notes in his hand.

After the district attorney declined to redirect, the judge dismissed Kris as a witness. Letting out a relieved breath, Kris left the stand and took a seat reserved for her on the front row. If the remainder of the trial was that easy, the verdict was in the bag.



"I heard a scuffle and realized my wife was no longer beside me. I turned in time to see her falling backwards, and a man run past me." Edward Hollingsworth sat emotionless on the stand, every dark hair in place, every stripe

on his suit clean and pressed.

Rahne knew he was really the star witness. He would pinpoint Griffith for the attack, and then the chase. Having such a reliable, respected witness was a rarity in her cases, where she usual had the displeasure of relying on pimps and drug dealers for her information.

She looked at her notes, feeling confident. Opening arguments had been short, but the edge obviously went to the prosecution. Monroe lived up to his hype with a dull, unconvincing statement of his client's innocence. If, as many times was the case, the jury had made up its mind on the opening alone, Griffith didn't have a chance. Kris Hollingsworth's sympathetic victim routine had also pleased the district attorney.

"Were you able to see the attacker at that point?" she asked.

"Yes, he was a tall, thin Caucasian. He had blonde hair and appeared very unwashed. After the attack, I began chasing him."

"How long did this pursuit last?"

Edward took a deep breath as he thought. "I would say no more than a couple of minutes. It seemed like longer at the time, but the distance was not that great. I was able to stop the man at the edge of Barrington Memorial Park."

Rahne was satisfied with his answer. "And what happened then?"

Cold blue eyes moved to the defendant and bounced off quickly. "At that point, the thief brandished a knife against myself and Mr. Dooley, who had joined me in pursuit of the culprit. The purse had been knocked free in the struggle, so I picked it up and threw it at the man, dislodging the weapon. Mr. Dooley then subdued him until a policeman arrived."

"What kind of knife did he have?"

Edward's brows knit slightly, but he quickly answered. "I believe it was a switchblade. It had a black handle and was about this long." He held his fingers several inches apart.

Rahne held up a plastic bag containing a nine-inch switchblade and walked to the witness chair. Laying it on the bench in front of Edward, she asked, "Do you recognize this weapon?"

"Yes, that looks like the knife the man was using."

She walked back to the podium knowing the pivotal moment was upon them. Years and years of television shows like *Matlock* and *Perry Mason* had prepared the jury for the identification, and they would surely miss it if it wasn't done. "Is your wife's attacker in the courtroom today?"

"Yes, he is."

"Could you please point him out for the jury?" Rahne asked, turning to the expectant faces of the twelve jury members.

Edward turned to face the defense table. "He looks much more presentable today, but he is the gentleman in the tan suit." He pointed a sure finger at Kirk Griffith.

"Thank you, Mr. Hollingsworth. I have no further questions for you."

Gratified, Rahne returned to her post and jotted down her final notes from the direct exam. Edward had done splendidly. She wondered if Monroe would have anything for him on cross, or just softball it as he'd done Kris.

The attorney's blue suit looked like it was a name brand, but the wrinkles and spots flushed the expensive effect down the toilet, along with the way the pants fit his full frame entirely too tightly. Rahne wondered how the man managed to make a living.

Monroe again stood at his table, bucking the respectful position of standing behind a podium. The judge said nothing as the attorney asked his first question of Edward.

"It's true that you didn't see the face of the thief when your wife was attacked, isn't it?"

Edward thought for a moment. "That is true."

"Okay, so you did not see my client at the time of the attack on your wife. When did you first see her assailant's face?"

"Well, as I chased the thief, I obviously could not see his face. I trailed him for several minutes. At one point, I ran into a crowd and slowed considerably. The man rounded a corner and then approached the intersection of Elm and Cottonwood. He stopped for a moment and looked back at me. That is when I saw his face." Edward nodded his head confidently.

"When the suspect rounded the corner, what was your distance away from him?"

Rahne suddenly felt a sinking feeling in her stomach. She had no idea what Edward would say.

"About ten yards, I believe."

Monroe smiled and nodded. "So when he rounded the corner, you couldn't see him, right?"

"Well, I could see—"

"Mr. Hollingsworth, you just testified that you were thirty feet behind him, and he rounded a corner. He had to have been out of your sight for a moment, right?"

Edward sighed, but finally agreed. "Yes, I could not see him, but it was only for a brief moment."

"Thanks Mr. Hollingsworth. That's all."

Rahne scratched several phrases in her notepad, then she quickly decided not to try any redirect. Edward hadn't mentioned that little revelation in his statement to the police, but it wasn't very damaging. Monroe didn't have anything to put with it, or at least she didn't think he did.

Looking at Edward's performance from every angle, she called Bruce Dooley to the stand, hoping no more surprises awaited her. Having an uninterested third party to corroborate the important parts of Edward's testimony would help greatly.

Once Bruce was introduced to the jury and identified to the judge, Rahne asked, "Where were you in relation to the Hollingsworths at the time of the attack?"

"I was about even with them on the other side of the street," he answered.

Rahne had never thought to ask the big man why he had been looking at the couple at the time Kris was robbed, but she didn't suppose it mattered now. The fact that he was looking was crucial. "And where were you looking?"

Bruce cleared his throat. "I happened to be looking at them when I saw a man approach them from behind."

"What did he look like?"

"About six-foot-two, gangly, with short blond hair. He was dressed very poorly and looked very out of place amongst the air fair crowd. The guy was easy to spot."

Smiling internally, Rahne loved the answer. Mr. Dooley was on his toes. "Did you see his face at that point?"

"Yes, I did."

"Is the man who attacked Kris Hollingsworth here today?"

Bruce pointed to Griffith. "Yes, he's right there."

"Okay, thank you, Mr. Dooley. Now what happened after the purse was taken?"

The bartender scooted forward in the chair, clasped his hands together, and leaned on the stand. He looked as if he'd testified before. "The guy took off down the street and Edward Hollingsworth tore out after him. I checked on Kris real quick, then I followed them. Mr. Hollingsworth started slowing down a little bit and I told him I was there to help. We caught him a little after that."

"Did he have a knife?"

"He pulled one out of his pocket. A nine-inch switchblade. He waved it around at us. Mr. Hollingsworth threw the purse and hit him, then I grabbed the guy's hand and twisted him until he dropped the knife."

Rahne presented him with the knife. "Is this the weapon he used that day?"

"It certainly looks like it."

"What happened after you apprehended the thief?" Rahne, happy with his testimony, began thinking about what her next move would be.

"I held him until the police came."

Rahne turned the large man over to the defense and Reed Monroe stood to ask his questions. "You say you were on the other side of the street when the attacked happened, is that right?"

Bruce scooted back in his chair and crossed his arms. "Yes, that's right."

"So that's—what—thirty feet?"

"Probably about that."

"The street was filled with people from the art fair, wasn't it?"

"It wasn't thick with people, but there were people there, yes."

Monroe nodded his head cockily. "And through this crowd of people, thirty feet away, you could see my client's face well enough to identify him now?"

The bartender's brown eyes narrowed slightly. "Yes, I could."

The attorney pursed his lips, but moved on. "And why were you looking at the Hollingsworths?"

Bruce raised his eyebrows. "I don't know. I was just looking that way at the time and I saw a suspicious character."

"So every person on the streets was dressed in an Armani suit like Mr. Hollingsworth and the thief stood out?"

"No, sir. I've had training—" Bruce stopped himself without finishing the thought.

Monroe cocked his head and looked interestedly at the witness. So did Rahne. "You've had training in what, sir?"

The big man's nostrils flared. "I've had experience learning to identify faces because I sometimes run into a rough crowd as a bartender. I don't let repeat offenders back in the bar."

"Okay, that's fair." Monroe stared at the witness for a long moment. "You ever let a repeat offender into the bar without identifying them?"

"I—what you do mean?"

"I mean, did you let someone in, then later figure out it was someone you'd kicked out before?" The attorney animatedly thrashed his hands.

Bruce hesitated, obviously uncomfortable. "Yes, but not very often."

"But you have misidentified people in the bar before?"

Furious, Rahne stood from her chair. "Objection, Your Honor. Asked and

answered."

The judge looked pointedly down his nose at Monroe. "Sustained."

"What do you do when you figure out you've identified someone wrong?"

"I show them to the door," Bruce answered.

Monroe stuck out his lower lip in a smug grin. "Do you carry a weapon, Mr. Dooley?"

"No, sir. I don't need one. I'm a pretty big boy, so most of the goons stay away from me."

"Yeah, you're very healthy. What happens when they don't leave on their own?"

The bartender shrugged his shoulders. Rahne supposed he didn't know where Monroe was going with this either. "Well, then I would physically remove the person."

"That's probably pretty satisfying, isn't it?"

Bruce tilted his head and gave a serious look to the attorney. "No, it isn't. I only physically remove someone as a last resort."

"Okay, when you restrained Mr. Griffith, did you treat him more harshly than you would have because you thought he'd harmed a woman you cared about?" Monroe asked.

Squinting his eyes, Bruce answered, "No, I just did what I had to do. The guy had a knife."

"You don't consider the fact that you pulled his shoulder out of socket excessive force?"

"I don't know that that happened, but I didn't use excessive force."

Rahne watched warily as Bruce's chest puffed out defensively. She could object to the information as irrelevant, but so far it wasn't damaging and she really wanted to know where the hell Griffith's lawyer was going with all this.

"And I guess the lacerations to my client's face from where you pushed him into a brick wall weren't excessive force either?"

Bruce sighed. "I didn't use excessive force."

Monroe finally rested, though the District Attorney still had no idea as to the purpose of the excessive force questions. Still, she thought it best to rehabilitate Bruce on that point. When the judge offered redirect, she accepted and moved to the podium.

"Mr. Dooley, during the struggle with Mr. Griffith, did you feel your life was in danger?"

Nodding, the witness answered, "Yes."

"Did you use more force than was necessary to protect yourself?" Rahne looked over to Monroe, who was bent above the defense table, scratching notes.

"No, ma'am."

"Thank you, that's all," she said.

The judge sighed and looked to the defense attorney. "Recross, Mr. Monroe?"

"Yes." Monroe stood and addressed Bruce. "So it would be correct to say that you think it's fair to act in a potentially damaging way if you feel your life is in danger?"

Bruce thought for a moment, evidently checking to make sure he wasn't walking into a trap. "Yes, that would be correct."

"Thank you. Nothing further." Monroe sat down and leaned over to confer with his client.



Heather Patterson leaned against the cold walls of the lobby, wondering what was going on inside the room on the other side. It hadn't been very long since the trial started, and they'd already called almost all of the witnesses. She hoped that since she was one of the last, that it didn't mean she was very important to the case. In any event she knew all she could do was tell the truth.

"Heather Delynn Patterson," a bailiff said from the door.

Glad her time had come, the young maid quickly pulled herself from her resting spot and entered the courtroom. She'd never testified before, but she felt like she knew what to expect. After she was sworn in, the District Attorney started

with easy questions, like her name and address. When she said Hollingsworth Manor's address, she looked directly to Edward, who smiled and nodded. It was nice to have some support.

"Did you see the attack on Kris Hollingsworth?" the tall, exotic-looking attorney asked.

"Yes. I was at a booth further down the street when I recognized them. Just at that moment, the guy came up from behind Kris and snatched her purse." Heather stopped. From the look on her face, Ms. O'Connor obviously wanted to ask another question.

"Were you able to see the man's face?"

The auburn-haired beauty nodded. "Yes, there were a lot of people, but I saw him. It was terrible."

"How far were you from the Hollingsworths?"

"Not too far. They were about two tables away, so I'd say twenty or twenty-five feet." Heather thought back to that day, and though she wasn't sure, she guessed her answer was right.

"Is the man who attacked Mrs. Hollingsworth here today?" Rahne's hands tightly gripped the sides of the podium.

Heather turned her eyes to the defendant, and after a moment, pointed to him. "He looks different, but that's him." She looked to Edward, who smiled approvingly.

"Thank you, Miss Patterson." The D.A. said, sitting down.

Reed Monroe walked to the dry erase board in front of the jury box and picked up a pen. The street was already drawn there, along with rectangles representing the art booths. He quickly drew two circles to represent Kris and Edward.

"Okay, the Hollingsworths were here," he pointed to them on the board, "so you must have been here." He drew another circle in the middle of the second table down. "Is that right?"

She nodded. "Yeah, that's about right."

"Were you standing next to one of these tables, like you were looking at the art,

or were you in the street?"

Heather's eyes darted to Edward. She wasn't sure. "I'm not sure. I must have been standing close to the table."

"Okay." Monroe picked up a red marker. "So," he began drawing more circles in between Kris and Heather, "there would have been people at the next tables, between you and Mrs. Hollingsworth, right?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"It was busy at the fair that day, wasn't it?"

"Um," Heather licked her lips and looked to Edward. He nodded imperceptibly. "Yes, there were a lot of people."

The attorney drew a line from Heather's circle to Kris', intersecting numerous members of the crowd he'd drawn. "So your testimony is that through this crowd of people, and through Edward and Kris Hollingsworth themselves, you could see the attacker's face?"

"I—yes, I saw him." Heather racked her brain. *I did see him, didn't I?*

"Isn't it true that you followed the chase and saw my client after he was apprehended by Mr. Dooley?" Monroe sauntered back to his table.

There was no question about that. "Yes, I helped Kris get down there."

"It's possible, isn't it Miss Patterson, that your first look at my client's face was at the end of the chase, rather than the beginning?"

Her brow furrowed as she thought. Behind Monroe sat Edward, who once again smiled at her encouragingly. "I don't—"

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, I guess it's possible."

"Thank you." The round man sat down, his look one of satisfaction.

Heather hoped she'd said the right thing. Ms. O'Connor looked quite anxious as she returned to the podium.

"Do you still assert that this man," she pointed to Griffith, "is the man who

attacked Kris Hollingsworth?"

The maid nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, I do."

Heather gratefully stepped down from the stand. It hadn't been that bad, but it could have gone better. As she went through the gate to the gallery, she saw Edward waving her over. He patted the empty space next to him and moved his legs so she could make her way to the seat. Kris sat next to him, and Bruce Dooley next to her. Heather ignored both of them as she sat next to the publisher.

Edward leaned over and whispered in her ear. "You did very well."

"Really?" she whispered back. "I wasn't sure about some of that."

"Do not worry," he said, patting her leg. "You were perfect."

Heather smiled as the activity in the courtroom increased. The district attorney called the police officer, Ford Blankenship, as the next witness. He was decked out very handsomely in his blue uniform and hat, the short sleeves of his shirt tight around his muscled biceps.

"Who was on the scene when you arrived?" Rahne asked, her hands still clamped tightly to the lectern. Heather couldn't help but notice the attorney looked slightly more frazzled than she had a few moments before.

"When I arrived, Bruce Dooley had the suspect pinned against a storefront. Edward Hollingsworth was standing nearby. A reporter named Abigayle Nguyen was also on the scene." The officer sat upright in the chair, very confident.

"What did you find at the scene?"

Ford nodded in understanding. The familiarity between the D.A. and the officer was apparent. "Mr. Dooley was frisking the suspect. A purse was approximately five feet from him, along with a nine-inch switchblade knife."

Rahne picked up her notepad. "What action did you take?"

"I took statements from witnesses and then placed the suspect in custody."

"Thank you, Officer Blankenship. Nothing further."

The defense attorney stood slowly, staring at the officer speculatively. "Before this incident, did you have any prior contact with Mr. Dooley?"

"Yes, he works at a bar that is on one of my patrol routes."

Monroe nodded smugly. "Is that a rough place?"

"It's not Disneyland, but we don't get a lot of calls from there," Ford responded.

"Why do you think that is?"

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "He's a big boy and he lets everyone know how to behave. The place has a built-in bouncer."

"Do you think Mr. Dooley likes dealing with the rowdies?"

Rahne jumped out of her chair. "Objection, Your Honor. Calls for speculation."

"Sustained," the judge said.

Monroe smiled, but didn't seem fazed. "Mr. Dooley was using physical force on my client when you arrived on the scene, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was restraining the suspect."

"Isn't it true my client was not resisting?"

Ford's face took on a deadly serious expression. "He didn't appear to be when I got there."

"Considering that, do you think he needed to dislocate my client's shoulder and ram his face into the wall?" Monroe pointed forcefully to Griffith.

"I didn't see what happened before—"

The attorney interrupted him. "That's not what I asked, sir. Was my client resisting as such to warrant the use of extreme force to detain him?"

The officer frowned. "No."

"Thanks," Monroe said, sitting down. He leaned over and whispered something to the blond-haired man beside him.

Ms. O'Connor again stood when offered more questions by the judge. A slight urgency tinged her voice. "Is it possible Mr. Dooley had been in fear for his life by the suspect's actions before you arrived?"

Nodding, Ford said, "Yes, there was a knife on the scene linked to the suspect."

"If a person was in fear for his life, would the kind of force Mr. Dooley was using be justified?"

"Yes, I believe it would," Ford answered forcefully.

Heather looked to Edward as the officer was dismissed. The publisher looked very smug. She wasn't sure, but the trial must have been going well.



Reluctantly, Rahne rested her case. The witnesses so far had done enough to carry her burden of proof, but some alarming holes had popped up where she hadn't expected them. Reed Monroe had done a surprisingly adept job at making her witnesses waver. At the moment, he had his client on the stand, a small surprise in its own right, telling a sob story about his unfortunate past.

"I lost my job three months ago," the lanky defendant said, remorse evident in his voice. "My landlord evicted me not long after that, so I've been living in either shelters or the streets."

Monroe smiled at him sympathetically. "Why were you at the Gossamer Falls Downtown Art Fair?"

"I just had to get away, you know? Those shelters just bring you down," Griffith responded.

"Tell me what happened that day."

"I was walkin' along, lookin' at the booths, when I saw a man runnin' toward me. He was dressed kinda like I was, and about the same height. It was all kind of a blur, though. As he got close, he tossed a bag right at me. I couldn't do nothin' but catch it." Griffith shrugged his shoulders, the fabric of his suit swishing against his shoulders. "When I looked up, I could see two big ol' boys comin' right at me. They looked mad, and they were lookin' at me, so I turned around and ran. I didn't know what was goin' on, but I didn't want any part of it."

"Did you have a reason to run?" the attorney asked.

"Yeah, those men looked like they were gonna kill me. I was scared. And I had a right to be. I ran until they dragged me down. To defend myself, I pulled my knife." His voice was truly apologetic. Rahne did not like the way his testimony

was going at all.

"At that point, did you try to explain the situation?"

Kirk raised his hand in frustration. "I tried, but before I knew what was happenin' the bigger guy was beating my brains out."

"Mr. Griffith, did you assault Kris Hollingsworth and take her purse?" Monroe asked directly.

Kirk Griffith, his muddy eyes precisely on Kris Hollingsworth, said, "No, sir. I did not attack that woman."

Rahne leafed through her notes as Monroe told the judge he was done with the witness and settled in his chair. She really needed to hammer this guy, but this story was catching her totally off guard. He hadn't given a statement to police, and she never could have dreamed this fiction. The lists of witnesses and other evidence Monroe provided hadn't given her a clue.

Angry at herself, Rahne went to the dry erase board and pointed at the two circles Monroe had drawn for Kris and Edward. "Is it your testimony that you were never here, to the north of Elm Street, on that day?"

"That's correct, I was never there."

"So the three witnesses that testified earlier and said you were there were lying?"

The man shook his head ruefully. "No, ma'am, but they were mistaken."

Her thoughts moving a hundred miles a second, Rahne fished her brain for a coherent line of questioning. "You say you ran because you were scared of the men running toward you. Why did you think they were after you if you did nothing wrong?"

"They were lookin' right at me and I had someone else's property in my hands. I figured that's what they were after. I never claimed to be no genius, ma'am. It was a mistake to run, but I did." Griffith glanced over at the jury and Rahne could see the sympathy in their eyes.

She knew she was losing any control she may have had. "If you're such a law abiding citizen, why did you happen to have a huge switchblade knife on your person?"

The witness looked down at his hands as he twisted them in his lap. "Ma'am, I'm down on my luck. I've got to live like no man should, out on the streets and in shelters that are almost as dangerous. It's not a pretty life, and sometimes a man is forced to defend himself. That knife has saved my life on more than one occasion."

Holy shit! Rahne internally screamed at herself. Every question seemed to dig a deeper hole for her case. The jury was going to start digging into their pockets to help the guy in a minute if she didn't do something.

"Sir, do you have a criminal record?" She hadn't been able to find anything, but the attorney hoped he might have an old history that didn't show up on the newer computers that provided all the information she had available.

Griffith shook his head in shame, took a deep breath, and answered. "As a youth I did, ma'am. My mama passed on when I was twelve and I had to make it on my own cause my dad weren't around. I got in some trouble shopliftin' a ham from a store once, but I was just hungry."

A mental image of Rahne putting a gun to her head, which was what she was doing to this case, popped in her mind. Every question she asked was against everything she'd ever been taught about cross-examination. If she didn't know the answer, she knew she shouldn't ask. And with each stupid step she took, she pulled a little more on the trigger.

"Sir, is it true that when you were apprehended by Mr. Dooley and Mr. Hollingsworth, you were in possession of the purse?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And it's also true that after they stopped you, you drew a knife and brandished it to them, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Rahne felt like jumping under the prosecution table, but instead she simple turned the witness over, which she should have done five minutes before. When the judge informed them it was time for a lunch break, she sighed with relief and just hoped she could get her case together and make a comeback in the afternoon.



Molly Crenshaw wasn't certain whether anyone would be home for lunch, but she

didn't want to be caught unprepared if the trial should end earlier than anticipated. It had been a busy morning, but the chores had given her a deeper appreciation of the amount of work performed by Heather. Molly had become so comfortable working with the young woman that she'd begun taking her presence and assistance for granted. Now with her joints aching from overexertion, she realized how much Heather did around the manor.

With winter rapidly approaching, Molly had noticed it took her awhile to move without stiffness after waking in the mornings. She supposed it was time to stop putting off the trip to the doctor's office. She tried to recall the last time she'd been to a doctor, but couldn't. She'd been lucky enough to have been blessed with relatively good health—at least until recently—and she'd never been one to rush to the doctor at the first sign of a sniffle. But with Heather's arrival, there was no reason Molly couldn't take off for an afternoon and go to a doctor.

"Bless ya, Lisa, for suggestin' we hire the girl," Molly muttered to herself. She tasted a spoonful of the spicy vegetable beef stew she'd prepared. "Mmm. I'm thinkin' my last name shoulda been Campbell," she chuckled.

The phone rang, interrupting her attempts at humor. "Hello?"

"Molly?"

Molly felt her face flush with warmth, a warmth that had nothing to do with the bite of spicy stew. "Yes, Leyland. 'Tis me."

"I'm pleased that you recognized my voice," Leyland Cross said.

It's not as if I've a half-dozen beaus ringing the line, Molly thought, but said, "O' course I recognize yer voice."

Leyland cleared his throat. "I wanted to ask you something."

Molly felt a flutter of excitement in her stomach. She turned to face the stove and leaned back against the counter. "Okay. Ask away."

"Well, I had such a good time with you at the restaurant when we went out that I was hoping you felt the same and would like to do it again."

Molly smiled. It was so nice to be keeping company with someone outside the house. Though she loved the Hollingsworths and considered them to be her family, she'd found, much to her surprise, that she enjoyed Leyland's company. In all her years in the Hollingsworths employ, she'd never had many suitors. In fact, before Leyland, her closest relationship with a man had been a flirtation

with the handyman who'd worked at the house before Clifton O'Connor, a flirtation that had ended when the man had stolen a brooch from Miss Constance some thirty years before. "I'd love to, Leyland."

"Can you get away this weekend?"

"Oh," Molly's heart sank. "I'm afraid I can't say for sure. What with the trial goin' on, there's a lot o' work ta be done around here. And Miss Constance phoned last night to say she and Miss Dominique are startin' back home today, so they'll probably be in this weekend."

"I understand," Leyland said slowly.

"I don't want ya ta think I'm tryin' ta avoid ya!" Molly cried, suddenly desperate for Leyland's understanding.

"I didn't think that, Molly. I was merely trying to fashion a solution to the problem."

"Oh."

"Can we perhaps play this by ear?" Leyland asked. "If there's even the slightest possibility that you'll be able to get away, I'd like to pursue it."

Molly blushed furiously, grateful that no one was there to see her. "Should I give ya a call if things work out?"

"Please do."

"I will," Molly promised.

"Then I'll be anxiously awaiting your call."



Reed Monroe only had two witnesses left to call, and not too much damage had been done to her case. At least that was what Rahne kept telling herself. The jury could reasonably be teetering on the edge at this point, but the prosecution still had a good chance at conviction.

Rahne cringed as her father was called to the stand. A low murmur rumbled through the audience as his name was recognized, reporters no doubt already scratching out their catchy bylines. She'd had good and bad experiences with the press since being elected to the office of district attorney, but she was sure

nothing good would come out of this case for her, win or lose.

The attorney pushed all personal thoughts aside and focused on the questioning of her father. Clifton O'Connor sat tall on the stand, his white hair and beard trimmed finely and combed to perfection. She was surprised to see him in a classy blue suit. The only time Rahne had ever seen him in a tie before had been for a funeral.

She felt like punching Monroe as he stood at the defense table, firmly an offense to the Court. If she were the judge, he would have been reprimanded long ago.

The slimy attorney pulled out a previously marked exhibit and leaned it on the dry erase board. It depicted the layout of the area of the attack, from the point of contact, to where the chase ended. He pointed to the graphic. "Do you recognize this map?"

"Yes, sir. That's where the art fair was, down on Elm Street."

"And where were you on the day Mrs. Hollingsworth was attacked?"

Monroe picked up the diagram and took it to the witness stand, placing it so that Clifton could point out his position to the jury. His weathered hand indicated one of the street cafés toward the end of the route. "Right here. I was having lunch with some friends." Rahne frowned as he looked at her.

"Okay, so if the attack was way up here," Reed said, drawing one of his infamous red circles, "you couldn't have seen it."

It was an improper question, and not even a question at all, but Rahne let it go. One of the important lessons as an attorney was learning when to object.

Her father nodded his head. "That's right. I didn't see Mrs. Hollingsworth get mugged."

"We've heard testimony here today that the man who stole Mrs. Hollingsworth's purse, was not the man captured at the end of the chase."

Rahne stood quickly. "Objection, Your Honor. Counsel is testifying."

The judge pulled off his reading glasses, dangling them at eye level as he reclined in his huge leather chair, his elbows supporting his weight. "Sustained, Mr. Monroe. Questions, please."

"Pardon me, Your Honor. I'd like to pose a hypothetical to the witness," the

defense attorney said, more respectful than he'd been all day.

"Your Honor, this man is not an expert witness," Rahne said, pointing to her father.

Monroe responded, "Mr. O'Connor is familiar with the layout of the area in question, Your Honor, and it's on that basis I would like him to speculate."

Nodding for several moments, the judge pointed at Monroe. "You may proceed, but tread carefully."

Rahne sat down and began writing furiously on her notepad. She hated the thought that the jury was about to hear opinions by her father as if he were a credible expert. He knew about carpentry, booze, women, and not much more.

"If two men were running, one about thirty feet from the other, and the first man turned this corner, he would be out of sight for the second man, wouldn't he?" The attorney slowly traced the chase with his red pen, stopping to put circles to represent the brief blind spot to which Edward Hollingsworth had admitted.

Clifton clinched his jaw in thought for a second. "Yeah, I s'pose that's right."

"Right, so if the first man, with the purse, handed that purse to another man, who then started running, by the time he got to here," Monroe pointed to a place on the sidewalk and made a dot, "the chaser would be about here?" He pointed to Elm and Cottonwood, where Edward had described himself the first time he saw the attacker's face, after he'd lost sight of him.

"I guess," Clifton said, clearly not understanding what was happening.

"In your opinion, could it be possible that during the brief time the attacker was out of Mr. Hollingsworths' range of vision, could that attacker have handed the purse to someone else?" Monroe put his marker against the board on the corner and left it there for Clifton and the jury to absorb.

The handyman studied the map for a few more moments and finally shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah, that's possible."

Rahne felt a coil tightening in her stomach. Her father was ruining this case. He had no authority to be up there acting like he knew what the hell was going on when he was clueless. Questions for cross-examination began flooding into her head.

To the district attorney's delight, Monroe turned over the witness. Rahne needed to strike hard and fast, or her case was already lost. She knew her line of inquiry was harsh, but in this situation she was a lawyer before she was a daughter. Rahne saw a huge opening to discredit his whole testimony she probably wouldn't have for the next witness, Abigayle Nguyen. No telling what that bitch would say. The attorney took a deep breath and resolved herself to the course she had to take.

"Did you have any alcohol that day, sir?"

Clifton frowned diminutively, probably so much so that no one else noticed, but Rahne could tell. "I had a couple o' beers with my lunch."

"How many is a couple?"

"I wasn't keepin' count, darlin'."

The district attorney took a few notes, stalling before the next question. Whether it was for dramatic effect for the jury, or her own reluctance, she wasn't sure. "Mr. O'Connor, are you an alcoholic?"

Before a shocked Clifton could answer, Monroe was out of his seat, sending it crashing against the dividing gate. "Objection, Your Honor. That's irrelevant."

"Goes to state of mind and ability, Your Honor. Mr. Monroe presented this witness as an expert at observation. His ability to observe would be impacted by alcohol use."

The judge nodded enthusiastically. "Overruled. I'll allow it. Answer the question, sir," he said, looking at her father.

Clifton's jaw was clenched and his cheeks red. "No, I am not an alcoholic, and how dare ya suggest it, Rahne!"

The judge leaned forward and pointed at the witness. "She's Miss O'Connor or District Attorney today, sir."

The handyman didn't look to the judge, his eyes boring into his daughter. She looked down at the podium again before her next question. "Do you ever black out?"

Clifton fairly snorted as a gust of frustrated breath left his lungs. "No, I don't. This is ridiculous."

"Do you ever lose time after drinking a couple o' beers?" she asked, imitating his accent at the end.

"No, I have not!" he responded, his closed fist slamming against the surface before him.

An image of Ford Blankenship entered Rahne's mind. She recalled his reluctance, the apology in his voice, when informing her of Clifton's recent traffic stop. "Have you ever had an alcohol-related traffic accident?"

"Dammit—" Clifton raged.

Monroe interrupted him. "Objection. He's already addressed this issue."

"Sustained," the judge said, looking pointedly at the district attorney. "Move to another line of questions, Counsel." A warning was clear in his voice.

Rahne jerked her notebook from the podium. "Nothing further." She plopped into her chair, knowing her case had just been lost, if she'd even been winning before her father's testimony. Even if the jury didn't give credibility to him, they had witnessed a daughter betraying her father, which gave her even less stature in their eyes. Sometimes being an unsympathetic attorney was enough to lose cases.

Monroe didn't redirect with Clifton, which was no surprise as Rahne had practically done it for him. Rahne watched Abigayle strut up the aisle and into the witness chair with disdain. She knew the snotty reporter must have loved being called as a witness, with all her colleagues reporting on the news she was making.

Trying to make her mind focus, Rahne listened only partially to what Abigayle was testifying. Monroe was solidifying Clifton's account of what happened, and the possibilities of it, with a more concrete, reputable witness. The attorney shook her head, wondering where this case had been before today. It certainly hadn't been in the file she had.

Rahne's ears perked up as Monroe brought Abigayle into the area of Bruce Dooley and his supposed rough dealings with the suspect. The reporter's dark eyes gleamed as she described in detail the bleeding cuts on Griffith's face and the way his arm was wrenched. It was obvious she loved every bit of drama she could eke out of a story.

When Monroe was finally finished, Rahne composed herself and walked to her position. If nothing else, she could enjoy getting under Abigayle's skin. "In

addition to witnessing part of this crime, you're a reporter also, right?"

"Yes, I am." Abigayle smiled sweetly.

"You'll do, or say, anything for a story, won't you?"

"Not anything. Contrary to popular belief, we do have ethics."

Rahne laughed. "Okay, have you ever secretly recorded a conversation?"

"No, that's against the law," the reporter faked shock.

"I don't suppose you've ever just hung out at the ER, then?" Rahne didn't know of anything specific Abigayle had ever done, but she knew there had to be something. The suggestion of impropriety was enough today.

Abigayle remained unflappable. "No."

"Fair enough. You have an obsession with news concerning the Hollingsworth family, though, don't you?"

"I wouldn't call it an obsession. The Hollingsworths are big news in Gossamer Falls. Every reporter wants to follow big news," the Asian woman said sensibly.

Rahne nodded, frustrated she wasn't getting more of a response out of the little bitch. "You broke a big story relating to Constance Hollingsworth and her daughter, didn't you?"

Abigayle beamed with pride. "Yes, I did."

"How did you get that story?" Rahne hated fishing, but she knew something unscrupulous must have happened for Abigayle to have landed that story.

"I can't reveal my source," she said, not quite as confident.

Scratching notes on her pad, Rahne desperately thought of somewhere else to go. She knew there was more, and she really needed it, but nothing would come. Her stormy brown eyes turned up to the reporter, wishing she could rip the slut apart. "You took some heat over the tone of that article, didn't you? A lot of people thought that was private, didn't they?"

Abigayle turned her head to the side and shrugged her shoulders. "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion."

Clenching her teeth, Rahne surrendered the witness and returned to her chair. She shook her head as Monroe stood for redirect.

"Have you ever been sued for libel or slander by the Hollingsworths over that article?"

"No."

"So what you wrote was true?"

Abigayle smiled. "It was completely true."

As Monroe sat down and the reporter joined the other leeches in the gallery, Rahne began considering if she could pull this case out during closing arguments, or if she should just kill herself now.



"Are you sure you have to leave?" Morgan Pritchard asked.

"I'm afraid so," Constance Hollingsworth said. "If I leave the boys in charge too long they'll start thinking they're capable."

Morgan laughed. "Oh, I can hardly wait to meet your family, Constance!"

"Don't you mean *our* family?" Dominique Carpenter asked.

Morgan smiled. "You know, it's been so great spending time with the two of you. I'm so happy you came to visit, even if your trip wasn't for that purpose."

"I'm glad, too," Constance said sincerely. "And I've enjoyed our conversations."

"Same goes for me," Dominique said.

"Oh, stop!" Morgan grabbed each of them and kissed them on the cheek. She pulled back, dabbing at her eyes. "You're making me cry."

"Aw," Dominique said, embracing her aunt, "don't do that."

"I can't help it," Morgan said. "I'm going to miss you two."

"You can always come to visit," Constance said.

"Really?" Morgan's eyes flickered brightly.

"Of course," Constance smiled. "The road to Gossamer Falls runs both ways, you know."

"Not the way you drive it," Dominique said, drawing a wicked glare from Constance.

Morgan smiled. "I'd really like to visit sometime soon, Constance. Maybe I can find someone to look after things here for a bit, so I can come for a visit. I'd like to see a real winter. You know—one with snow."

Constance laughed. "If you come up during the winter, I can guarantee you'll see plenty of that."

"Then I'll do my best to be there," Morgan said.

"I'm looking forward to it," Constance said.



"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, what say you?" The bailiff, and the entire courtroom, turned to the foreperson.

A plump little woman stood up in the corner of the jury box. Her clothes were slightly rumpled, but that effect must have been caused by the seven-hour trial. They'd only deliberated for a little over one hour, so it couldn't have been that.

Slipping on a pair of half-glasses, she opened a folded piece of paper and began reading. "We the jury, so empowered by our great state, find the defendant, Kirk Allen Griffith, as to counts one through seven, not guilty."



It was with no small degree of trepidation that Tiffany Stevens approached the lady behind the counter. She felt out of place wearing her new dress through the mall, but Billy had wanted to do something nice for her, so her mother had insisted she go along with it.

"Welcome to Sophisticated Snaps. Can I help you?" the young, well-dressed brunette asked.

Tiffany turned to glance back at her mother and Billy.

"Go ahead, Tiffany," Joyce Stevens urged, smiling broadly.

William Devlin surveyed Tiffany's face, then spoke to the brunette behind the service counter. "This young lady would like to have some photographs taken."

"Okay," the brunette smiled. "Let's take a look and see what we want to try to do."

Tiffany tried her best to ignore the adults as they talked prices and poses. Billy and her mom were a lot more enthused than she was. At last, they reached some agreement and a black woman began messing with her hair and makeup while the photographer rattled on about backdrops and lighting.

As the photo session began, Tiffany found herself debating whether to follow the instructions of her mother or the photographer, who were almost continually at odds. Finally, Joyce dramatically thrust her hands into the air and walked away. Tiffany watched her mom for a moment, then turned to look at Devlin, who smiled reassuringly at her. A little more at ease, she relaxed and began following the photographer's advice.

"Where'd Mom go?" Tiffany asked Devlin after the session had ended and it was time to select the pose from which the prints would be made.

"I dunno. She got a little upset and said she was gonna go sit down someplace for awhile."

Tiffany nodded. It was just like her mother to throw a fit if she wasn't getting her way. "Do you think we should go get her for this?"

Devlin waved away her suggestion. "Nah. I think we can handle it."

Tiffany smiled. A few weeks before, she'd been embarrassed to be seen with Billy. Now she felt reassured by his presence and confidence. "Okay."

They pored over the selections, narrowing the field to two contenders. When Devlin pointed a thick finger at one and said, "Your eyes really sparkle in that one," Tiffany chose it without hesitation.

They were told it would take about an hour for the prints to be developed and decided to spend the time trying to find Joyce. Their search was short-lived as they saw her sitting in front of a PC at a cybercafé three shops down from Sophisticated Snaps.

"Let's go grab a cup of coffee and join her," Devlin suggested.

"Okay," Tiffany said, eager for a latte, but unenthusiastic about joining her mother. From the look of concentration on Joyce's face, Tiffany knew exactly what she was doing.

"Why don't you order for us," Devlin said, thrusting a handful of small bills at Tiffany, "and I'll go tell your mother about the pictures."

"Sure," Tiffany said.

"I want mine strong and black," Devlin said as he limped away.

Tiffany nodded and moved toward the counter. A moment later, she had their cups in hand. She turned to see Devlin walking toward her, a puzzled expression on his face. "What's wrong?" she asked.

He took the cup from her. "Your mom says she's busy and that we should wait on her over here somewhere."

"Oh."

Tiffany deliberately chose a seat where she wouldn't have to see what her mother was doing. Devlin sat opposite her, staring at Joyce in apparent bewilderment.

"Man, she really gets into that stuff," he said. "It took her a minute to realize I was there. I thought she was gonna smack me when I leaned over her shoulder to get her attention."

Tiffany nodded knowingly as she sipped the latte. "She does that a lot," she said, surprising herself with the admission.

"Does what?"

"Gets on the Web and loses track of time."

Devlin patted his shirt pocket that contained his cigarettes, then, perhaps remembering there was no smoking allowed in the mall, wrapped both hands around his cup. He stared thoughtfully at Joyce for a moment, then turned to Tiffany. "Just goes on the Web in general or to certain sites?"

"She goes to casinos all the time," Tiffany said, feeling relieved by speaking the words. "She can't stop playing. Sometimes I go to bed at night while she's using the computer in my room and when I wake up in the morning she's still there."

Devlin sat motionless and stared at Tiffany.

"She makes sixty thousand dollars a year, but we have to live in those crummy apartments because she gambles it all away on those stupid games," Tiffany blurted, suddenly finding herself dangerously close to tears. She tightly clutched her cup, willing herself not to cry.

Devlin looked away, staring at Joyce's beatific, transfixed face as it was illuminated by brightly colored lights that flashed on the monitor before her.