

## Excerpt from Ghost Mark

**Jane's nightmares are back—and this time,  
they've unleashed a brutal killer.**

Jane Walker's nightmares aren't imaginary—they're glimpses into the past; and the past can be dangerous, especially when Jane inadvertently reveals her ghost form to a ruthless killer. Now he's come looking for her and targets the man she loves. Jane must keep one step ahead of this cold-blooded assassin before he gets rid of Ethan permanently. She has one last chance to derail him, but that means taking her most dangerous dream journey yet—one from which she might never awaken.

### 1 | Jane

Guilt was a nagging constant in Jane Walker's life, a gargoyle digging its claws into her spine. She inhaled a heavy breath and steeled herself to return to work. Jane used to love her nursery job at Positively Plants in Vancouver's West End. But seeing Pieter in his wheelchair every day, and his mom, Anna, with her cane, ate away at her conscience. And then there was Buddy. She wanted to believe that he had survived her unforgivable lapse of judgment—the lack of a death certificate was a glimmer of hope—but it had been months now, and she hadn't found him.

“You done?” Ethan said, reaching across the brushed-steel bar for Jane's plate.

Shaken from her thoughts, Jane looked up. “Yeah, thanks.” She rested her fork beside the cold French fry she'd been scooting around her plate and nudged the dish in his direction, catching the slight lift at the edge of his smile that was just for her.

The mirror on the wall of bottles behind him reflected the sunlight that soaked through frosted windows, brightening the room. The effect was amplified by steel tables and blond-wood chairs, the product of a recent renovation. Music drizzled in the background, but tonight, when the line formed outside, Riptide's lights would dim and the music would thump.

Ethan set Jane's plate in the bussing bin beside the glass washer. A wayward New Year's streamer lay drunkenly underneath.

Jane checked the time. "Guess I'd better go."

Laughter erupted from a table of safety-vested construction workers across the room, who dwarfed their table. Fanny, their server, waved them off and bustled up to the bar.

"They giving you a hard time?" Ethan asked, as she loaded her tray with the pints of beer Ethan had just pulled. Ethan was notoriously protective of the staff, not that Fanny needed it; though petite, she was a career server and could fend off the worst of the liquid lunch crowd.

"They wouldn't dare," Fanny said, picking up her overloaded tray and starting back.

Ethan turned to Jane. "You coming over tonight?"

Her relationship with Ethan Bryce was still fresh, exciting. He was the first man who'd seen beyond her birthmarks, back when she had birthmarks. The first man who'd loved her without an ounce of pity. That he was also ripped and handsome was a delicious extra.

"After eight, okay?" Jane slid off the bar stool and pulled on her jacket. "Thanks for lunch."

"Anytime," Ethan said.

She grabbed her helmet and started for the door, but the sound of breaking glass startled her. She swung her head toward the commotion and saw Fanny looking in her direction. With an apology to the construction worker, whose beer she'd just dropped, Fanny darted her gaze away.

Jane paused, wondering what had spooked her, and stepped forward again, not noticing that a wall of a man had veered into her path. She knocked into him hard enough to loosen her grip on the helmet, and gasped as it fell to the floor, bounced, and landed at the feet of the man's companion.

"Sorry," she said to the brick wall she'd bumped into. The man acknowledged her apology with a curt nod, no smile. No wonder Fanny had dropped a glass. He stood his ground, a boulder in a stream, flotsam flowing around him. He ran his hand over the dome of his clean-shaven head.

The other man stooped to pick up her helmet. Raindrops glistened on the shoulders of his canvas jacket.

"Thank you," she said.

He glanced up at her as he handed her the helmet. Jane sucked in a breath. His eyes were mismatched, one hazel, one brown. She scrutinized him, a more perfect version of the man she remembered. Jane could hardly catch her breath. She'd been searching for him for months. "Buddy?"

A spark of recognition flashed in his eyes before the man frowned. "Ah . . . no." He looked at his friend with a shrug that suggested Jane had been overserved.

No? He was beefier than the Buddy she knew, and taller, but Jane had only ever seen him in a wheelchair. And Buddy was just a nickname. Might be that in this altered reality, he didn't have that nickname. She reached for him, stammering while her tongue caught up to her memory. "Dylan?" That was his given name, Dylan O'Brien.

He stepped back, raising his arms like she had some kind of contagion. "I don't know you, lady." He then turned and continued toward the bar. The wall that was his companion dismissed her as well and moved alongside him.

But how many people had those eyes? It had to be him. She called after him. "Is your mom's name Mary?"

He rounded on her, annoyed now. "You got the wrong guy."

From behind the bar, Ethan caught Jane's attention and shook his head. A warning. She knew better than to ignore it. Though it killed her, she left Riptide without another word, wondering what it was Ethan knew about Buddy. And how long had he known him? She took some comfort in having seen him, in knowing he was alive, but she'd have to wait until tonight to learn the reason for Ethan's warning. The wait would be torturous. Her curiosity about this version of Buddy was an itch she was dying to scratch.

After work, Jane parked her Rebel 500 in the gravel patch underneath the second-floor bay window. She removed her helmet and headed inside the old Victorian mansion that had been renovated into disjointed apartments.

Until late last year, she and her best friend, Sadie Prescott, had shared the one-bedroom unit in the basement. But in the aftermath of Jane's kidnapping—instigated by Rick—Sadie's former john, Sadie had moved out and taken over the studio unit down the hall and adjacent to the poorly insulated utility room that housed the noisy furnace and boiler. It was a financial stretch for Jane to cover the rent without a roommate, but she'd paid off her Rebel, and that helped.

Both Sadie and Jane's apartment doors hung open, the only two units on that floor. Jane stood on the threshold of her own place and peered inside, past the worn velour sofa to the kitchen beyond. "Hey, Sade."

Sadie, who had her head in Jane's clunker of a fridge, straightened. "Good. You're home. Do you have fresh basil? I'm trying a new recipe." Sadie's blonde curls were tied in a knot on top of her head.

"Sorry. There might be a packet of dried, though. Try the cupboard."

Jane set her helmet on the floor and hung her biker jacket on a hook by the door. Though Sadie hadn't lived

with her for months, she frequently made herself at home here. Jane didn't mind. They'd stitched up the gash Rick had caused in their lifelong friendship, and it had left only a small scar. She liked having Sadie around. They'd been inseparable since their group-home days. More than best friends. Fierce friends. The kind you'd protect with your life, and they had—with fists, and knives, and words as sharp as finely honed steel.

"I collected your mail," Sadie said. "It's on the trunk."

"What are you making?"

"Penne pesto."

It was exactly like Sadie not to have one of the main ingredients of a dish she was cooking. "There's a jar of pesto in the cupboard."

Sadie found it. "Great. That'll work."

Jane sat on the sofa and absently flipped through her mail. She stopped at the government envelope with the British Columbia Crown Counsel's logo on it. The prosecutor. "Shit."

"What is it?" Sadie came to sit with her.

Jane read the letter. "Looks like it's started. I have to arrange my first meeting with Crown counsel. Ms. Monica Fowler."

Jane had thought the trial was still months away. The man responsible for her kidnapping, Dr. Roderick Atkins, aka Mr. Rick Kristan, was safely locked up. She and Sadie had known him as Rick and still referred to him that way. Rick had learned Jane could manipulate the past, and he'd mistakenly thought he could starve her to the point she'd do his bidding and kill his brother.

"I am so not looking forward to reliving those events on the witness stand." But unless Rick pleaded guilty, Jane would have no other option. She handed the letter to Sadie. "So much for wishful thinking."

Sadie straightened her spine but wouldn't look at Jane.

Jane pulled the letter out of Sadie's grip before her friend could spiral. "Rick is responsible for what happened to me, not you." Sadie never used to hold on to regret. She was a free spirit, often touting their old mantra: never look back. But she had a firm grip on her guilt over what had happened to Jane. It saddened her to see the change in Sadie.

Jane steered the conversation in a happier direction. "Guess who I saw today?" She told Sadie about bumping into Buddy at Riptide.

"You sure it was him?"

"He was taller than I would have thought. About Ethan's height."

Jane's phone rang. "That'll be Ariane. You want to say hi?" Ariane Rebaza was the professor helping Jane navigate the minefield of her visiting dreams.

"Nah. Another time," Sadie said. "Come over when you're done."

Jane understood Sadie's reluctance. She hadn't yet shaken off the shame of admitting to Ariane that she had been a prostitute, and that she had played a part, albeit unwittingly, in Rick's scheme to get his hands on Jane.

But Jane had forgiven her. They'd both made mistakes.

Jane answered Ariane's call and turned on the video. She recognized Ariane's kitchen in her family's home in Lima. Ariane was a slight woman in her thirties with olive skin and expressive dark eyes. Her long ebony hair was pulled back in her customary ponytail. To Ariane's left sat her grandmother, Yessica, an elegant if birdlike woman with a nest of white hair piled on her head. To her right was an elderly woman named Rosa Yupanqui. Rosa was sturdy and thick-necked with cropped steel-grey hair and hard eyes.

The elderly women were from what Ariane called "the old families." They held the knowledge of the old ways and passed it on to the next generation. The younger generation scoffed at their lore, but not Ariane. She was a renowned

Inca scholar who'd dedicated her life to exploring and preserving their history.

And now Jane was caught up in it as well. After learning of her dreams, Ariane and the old families had identified her as *una testigo*, a Witness. As was Jane's late mother, a woman Jane had only seen in her dreams. The old families hadn't known about Jane or her mother. In Peru, Witnesses hadn't existed for more than a hundred years.

Rosa's face split into a wide smile. She spoke Spanish, which Ariane translated. "Rosa is asking if you've dreamed yet." Ariane's accent had gotten more pronounced since she'd left Vancouver to return to Lima.

"No. Nothing yet." Jane hadn't had what she called a visiting dream since her twenty-fifth birthday more than five months before. Rosa understood Jane's reply without translation, and her smile faded. Rosa had great hopes that in one of her dreams, Jane would be able to locate a family heirloom, a ritual offering bowl. The very bowl responsible for the blood marks that had now faded from Jane's body.

Rosa and Yessica exchanged words that sounded like grave disappointment.

"Tell her I'm sorry. If I ever figure out how to choose what I dream of, I'll try to find the bowl for her."

Ariane translated and, after further follow-up in Spanish, the two elderly women nodded.

"They've been praying for you," Ariane said, with a mischievous smirk. "But I'm not sure you'd appreciate it; their prayers are for your dreams to return."

Jane forced a smile. Her dreams weren't like other people's. Hers were dangerous. She dreamed of the past. And at times, unpredictably, she slipped into those dreams. When that happened, one misplaced step could change history. Buddy and Pieter were living reminders of that.

Jane had dreamed of the night Buddy was born—the same night Pieter was born. On impulse, Jane had helped Buddy's heavily pregnant mom navigate an icy patch of

pavement at St. Paul's hospital. Jane had thought she'd prevented a life-altering fall. But all she'd done was delay the accident and change the victim. Now Pieter was in a wheelchair instead of Buddy.

"Gracias," Jane said. "Please tell them I'll call you if I dream again."

"Not if," Ariane said. "When."



## 2 | Sadie

Sadie returned to her own apartment. If Ariane's previous calls were anything to judge by, Jane would be at least an hour. She unscrewed the lid on the jar of pesto, dipped her finger into the oily mixture, and tasted it. "Mmm," she mumbled, thinking it needed a little more garlic. She set the jar on the counter and fished a dirty pot out of the sink. After she gave it a quick scrub, she filled it with water and set it on the hot plate for later.

She wasn't much of a cook, but since she'd had to cut back on eating out, she'd had to get used to the daily grind. And that's what it felt like. A grind. The tiny kitchen didn't help. Could you even call it a kitchen? It was six feet of counter with a combination hot plate and half fridge on one end, a handful of shallow cupboards, and an exhaust fan that moved the air around at best and was as loud as a jet engine. It was a good thing she didn't have much kitchenware.

She wandered back to the table she used for a desk and sighed. When she'd committed to the online bookkeeping course, she'd neglected to factor in the monotony of it. She also hadn't figured that she'd have to get her high school equivalency before the gatekeepers let her into the accounting program. But Jane and Sadie's former social worker, Nelson Leonard, had pulled some strings and secured her a seat in the accelerated GED program. It had taken eight intensive weeks of study, but when she passed the exams, she'd never been prouder.

The irony of being a legit student, after faking it for years as one of Cynthia Lee's teacher's pets, had lost its humour. Every month, when her rent was due, she thought about how easy it would be to pick up the phone and take one of Cynthia's gigs. Sadie mourned the shopping haunts that she hadn't visited in months. A thousand dollars for a

few hours of work was more profitable and not nearly as mind-numbing as introductory taxation.

But she'd promised Jane she was done with the easy money. More importantly, she'd promised herself. So she sat down, refreshed her screen, and picked up where she'd left off.

An hour later, Jane tapped on her door. "You're a lifesaver," Sadie said, rubbing her face. She closed the laptop and pushed her books and papers aside.

Jane flopped into a beanbag chair Sadie had found at Goodwill. "How'd your date with Mike go?"

Sadie had collided with Mike inside the door of the classroom on the first day of GED classes. She'd been running late, and he'd been unimpressed. He was a brute of a guy, tall, inked, and built like a pro wrestler. Just her type. He ignored her, but her instincts told her he was paying attention. She dropped her phone number on his desk on the day of the final exam.

He called. They'd been tearing each other's clothes off for coming on three months now.

"He took me to the diner on Fourth, the one with the lineup on Sundays. Went back to his place. Gotta give him full points for stamina, but he could use more coaching on style."

Jane laughed. "He's dating the right chick for that advice." She picked at the seam of the chair. "Have you told him yet?"

Sadie rolled back from the desk and gazed out the stubby excuse for a window. Before Sadie had been sent into the system, she'd been raped by her dead mother's boyfriend. She wasn't even a teenager, and he had her working for his protection. People who had never experienced that life, who thought little girls wore tutus and pigtailed, would never understand how normalized sex for money was on the streets.

“It didn’t come up.” Sadie had played out a dozen different ways to tell Mike about her past, but she couldn’t bring herself to follow through. And she didn’t want to think about it anymore. “How’d it go with Ariane?”

“She’s translating a stash of diaries she says look promising.”

“From a Witness?”

“Yeah. Guy named Pedro. He died in the mid-1800s. The old families have been helping with the search.”

“They must be disappointed your dreams haven’t come back.”

“Ariane said they pray for me,” Jane said, quirking an eyebrow.

“As in pray you’ll dream again?”

“Yeah, but she said it with a laugh.”

Sadie knew all about the dreams Jane had been having since she was a kid. Dreams of the past, of people she knew suffering at the hands of abusers. Sadie would have dismissed it as bullshit if Jane hadn’t proved her truth, recounting episodes from Sadie’s history she’d rather have forgotten.

“How was work today? Did mean mom take her happy pills?” Sadie hadn’t thought Anna Bakker, Jane’s boss at Positively Plants, could be any more of a bag, but after Jane’s abduction, Anna had stepped it up. It was almost as if Anna blamed Jane for her own kidnapping. As if Jane going AWOL was a personal affront to her and the store.

“I wish there was something I could do for her.”

“You’re doing it. Showing up early every day, staying late. She’s lucky to have you.” What Sadie didn’t voice was that Jane’s continued attempts to ingratiate herself with the bag made Sadie want to scream. Jane didn’t even need the damn job. She was sitting on an inheritance—a whack of cash from the Walkers, the couple who’d adopted her. Jane was only two years old when they’d died in a fire, but they’d

had life insurance. Jane had learned of it last year, after her twenty-fifth birthday.

Unfortunately, Jane blamed herself for the fire that killed the Walkers, despite Sadie and Nelson's countless reassurances that she couldn't possibly, or reasonably, have been responsible. But Jane couldn't let go of the fact that her little two-year-old hand had been holding a spent match when they found her safe and sound on the burning home's front lawn.

The shopping spree they'd initially planned had been eroded by Jane's misplaced guilt. Jane was now determined not to spend the inheritance on herself, which drove Sadie batty. Jane didn't even remember the Walkers, but somehow, she'd gotten it into her stubborn head that they would want her to spend the money on needy kids. Sadie was still working out how to fit herself into that category.

Sadie got up with a stretch. "You hungry?"

"Starving."

Sadie plodded to the stove and turned on the burner under the water pot. "Can I ask a favour?" She and Jane had traded favours all their lives, but this one felt more important.

"Sure."

"I have to find a company where I can do an internship. I thought you might have an in with the accountants who manage the Walkers' money."

"It's worth a shot," Jane said. "I'll ask them."

"Terrific," Sadie said, relieved. She took a chair beside her. "So tell me about Buddy."

"He came into Riptide. I wouldn't have even noticed him if I hadn't dropped my helmet. Buddy picked it up, and I noticed his eyes. One hazel, one brown."

Jane's obsession with this Buddy character hadn't subsided since the day she'd learned what had happened to Pieter. She had been certain he'd eventually show up, and now he had. Sadie couldn't wait to meet the guy.

“Did he recognize you?”

“Said he didn’t, but I think he was lying. Didn’t know the name Buddy, though, or even Dylan. But Ethan knows something about him. He warned me off after Dylan insisted he didn’t know me. I’ll drag it out of Ethan later. I’m going to see him tonight.”

Sadie held her tongue. Jane didn’t want to hear Sadie’s jaded opinions about Ethan. Following Jane’s abduction, he’d been unbearably arrogant about Sadie’s choice of side hustle.

“While we’re on the name subject, have you made a decision about changing yours?” Jane’s original name was Baby Jane Doe. Her adoptive parents had kept the name Joyce, given to her by a hospital nurse. But last year, Jane had learned her birth mother had wanted to name her Beth. Ever since, she’d been waffling about changing it legally.

“I’ve given it a lot of thought,” Jane said. “Honestly, I think it might be asking too much of everyone.”

“Why would you think that? It’s the name your mom wanted for you. Besides, BMW is classic.” Beth Morrow Walker. The name Jane had chosen honoured her mother, Rebecca Morrow, and her adoptive parents, the Walkers.

“I’ve been testing it out,” Jane said. “Ordered takeout at the falafel place the other day. They must have called out for Beth four times before I realized it was me they were calling. I felt like a moron.”

“Yeah, but a classic moron.”

### 3 | Ethan

Ethan heard Jane's motorcycle enter the back alley and glanced out his kitchen window. The caged light above Riptide's back door had burned out. He made a mental note to replace the bulb on his next shift.

Jane had no idea how hot she looked straddling that bike. She parked her Rebel beside his Fat Boy, dismounted, and waved when she looked up to his window. Jane wasn't like other women he'd known. She was completely unoccupied with her looks. The birthmarks she'd had most of her life had warped her perception of herself. And even though the marks were gone now, she still avoided her reflection. She didn't even wear makeup. But she didn't need to. Her beauty was ingrained in her confident stride, the way she swung her silky hair like a sword, the ferocity of her loyalty.

He'd experienced the rejection of women who'd cringed when they saw the burn scars on his stomach, but not Jane. She hadn't flinched, hadn't even looked away. She was formidable and nonjudgmental to a fault. And that fault had a name: Sadie Prescott.

He raced out of the apartment and down the three flights of stairs. She smiled as he opened the door and greeted her with a kiss. Her lips were cold. "Let's get you warmed up," he said, taking her helmet.

Rather than summoning the doddering elevator, they jogged up the stairs. He imagined the tenants on the eighth floor were either very fit or very patient.

He pushed open the door to his apartment and set Jane's helmet on the end of the bed. Other people might have found his bachelor unit on the small side, but it was all he needed, a place to bunk. The money he saved in rent was going to a better cause: his new acreage in the Sunshine

Valley. He was impatient to get back out there, to move his Airstream in, but the property was still covered in snow.

“Tell me about Buddy,” Jane said. “Why’d you warn me off?”

“He goes by the name Joey Hampton. His partner, the big guy? His name’s Garvin Burman. You don’t know them, and you don’t want to know them.”

“Joey is Buddy, I’m sure of it. I looked up the mismatched eye colour thing. It’s called heterochromia, and it’s rare. That guy is Buddy. He’s real name’s Dylan O’Brien.”

He took her hands. “His real name is Joey Hampton. I know it kills you, what happened to Pieter and Buddy, but you’ve got to let it go.”

She looked at their hands. “I just want to know what happened to him, that’s all.”

“You don’t. Trust me.”

“How do you know him?”

He dropped her hands. “Want a beer?”

“You’re changing the subject.” She pulled off her boots, careful as always to check that her boot knife—a knife she was remarkably deft at handling—remained in place.

He propped his hands on his hips. He knew she couldn’t let the Joey topic go. “The Buddy you knew doesn’t exist anymore,” he said, and headed to the fridge. He pulled out two Coronas, popped the caps, and handed her one. “Joey Hampton is a piece of shit, and his partner is the disposable wipe he’s stuck to. Feel better?”

She laughed. “Hardly. I need more. Don’t be so stingy with the details.” She hung her coat on the back of a kitchen chair and sat down.

“Joey and Garvin are the thugs I told you about. The ones who have Connor’s nuts in a vice.” Connor Boyd, and a partner Ethan had never met, were Riptide’s owners.

“You said Connor denied it.”

“Yeah, ages ago. I don’t believe him. He’s changed. Something’s going on.” He took the other seat at the table. “When he fired Jerry and made me day manager, he said it was temporary. Brought in the new night guy. Said he knew my skills were wasted on days and he’d hire another day manager. It’s been five weeks. He’s not even looking. Makes me think he wants me out of there after six.” The day manager worked late morning until 6:00 p.m. In the history of Riptide, there’d been maybe five daytime brawls that needed his level of skill. The night shift is where he belonged. The regulars knew him, knew his reputation. And those who didn’t and chose to be aggressive, learned it soon enough. No one got out of line on his watch.

“Did you challenge him on it?”

“Tried. He reminded me he owns the joint and he’ll get to it when he goddamn pleases.” Ethan took a slug of his beer.

“That doesn’t sound like Connor. I thought you guys were friends.”

“Yeah, me too. But he hasn’t been himself. Not since those two showed up.” Ethan considered Connor one of the finest men he knew and the most easygoing boss he’d ever had. “And a few weeks ago, he changed my QuickBooks access. Now all I can see is inventory. I have no idea what the balance sheet or the bank balance look like.”

“Don’t you help with the books?”

“Not anymore. Says he’s doing it himself. Wants to get a better grip on the finances. Which would make sense if he knew how to use QuickBooks.”

“He knew enough to change the passwords.” Jane turned her bottle in its ring of condensation.

“You only have to sign in to do that. He doesn’t know thing one about generating reports, doing the payroll. If he’d asked me to show him how to use it, I might have believed him.”

“He’s shutting you out.”



“He’s trying. I’m not that easy to get rid of. I don’t know what they’ve got on Connor, but it’s serious.” And Ethan was patient. He’d find out.

“I wonder where he lives.”

“Who? Joey?”

She looked up, and he could see the curiosity behind her gaze.

“Leave it be, Jane. He’s not Buddy, and he’s mixed up with some serious shit.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not going to stalk him.”

“No?” Ethan knew how determined Jane could be. But she was deep in thought again, drawing spokes in the beer’s condensation ring, and didn’t catch his skeptical tone.

“You think Joey or Garvin could be Connor’s partner in the business?”

“Not a chance. His partner was a university mate, his age. Fifties, despite what all the ladies think. Joey and Garvin are late twenties max.”

Women flocked to Connor’s easy smile, beach hair, and the dimples that erased ten years from his birth certificate. “What do you think they’re up to?”

“I wish I knew.”

Jane sat forward and propped her elbows on the table. “Tell me more about Joey. How long have you known him?”

Ethan sighed. Jane wouldn’t be easily distracted from Joey. She’d been curious for too long. “First time I saw him in Riptide was around Halloween. He was with Garvin, as always. They looked like trouble, so I kept an eye on them. They came in a handful of times after that, had a beer, and left. A few weeks later, Connor started coming out to meet them, and they’d go into the office. I followed him once. Just to check on him, but he shooed me out of there as if I was butting into a secret club meeting, persona non grata.”

“Is that when he fired Jerry? Put you on days?”

“Soon after, yup.” Ethan stretched his leg to the side and nudged her foot. “We aren’t going to spend our whole night talking about Riptide, are we? Tell me about Ariane. Did you learn anything new from her tonight?”

Ariane had a PhD, so she was legit. She was also the only one who could shed light on what Jane experienced. And since Jane’s marks had vanished, Jane had grown increasingly uneasy. Her sleep was fitful, and she was always on edge, waiting to fall into one of her paralytic dreams. It had been months since she’d had one, and he’d never seen it first-hand. Truth be known, he wouldn’t be upset if it stayed that way. He hoped those wild dreams of hers were a thing of the past.

Jane told him about the diaries Ariane was translating, and how she hoped they held clues to controlling her dreams. Ethan still found it difficult to wrap his head around how her dreams worked, but he didn’t doubt her. Not after she’d told him about the night he’d been burned. Only someone who’d witnessed the accident would have known those details.

But at least she’d moved off the Joey topic. He was a threat. Garvin may have been more senior in whatever organization they belonged to, but Joey was smart, observant, and he moved like a fighter, light on his feet. Garvin moved like a bull: head down, barrelling into anything in his path.

When they’d drained their beers, Ethan collected the bottles and set them on the counter.

“I got a letter from the Crown counsel’s office,” Jane said. “It’s started. They’re prepping for trial.”

They’d both been dreading this day. Lawyers were clever. One slip-up in Jane’s testimony was all it would take to paint her as delusional. If that happened, Rick and Andy would walk away unscathed.

“The police collected a shit-ton of evidence against both of them.”

“Let’s hope it’s enough.”

He closed the blinds while Jane updated him on Sadie’s progress with her new career. Ethan was glad Sadie was trying to turn her life around, but unlike Jane, he hadn’t forgiven her for putting Jane’s life in danger. And he found Sadie’s naïveté disingenuous. Hookers weren’t that stupid.

He sidled up to Jane and offered her his hand. “Care to join me?”

“Depends.” Jane’s mouth eased into a seductive smile. “Where are you going?”

He held her gaze as he pulled her into his arms and kissed her. “Thought we’d go for a walk,” he said, guiding her backwards to the bed. With each step, another piece of clothing dropped to the floor. “And then maybe play a game of doctor.” The few clothes that remained peeled off easily once Ethan and Jane were horizontal. He couldn’t imagine ever tiring of caressing her, kissing her in places that made her shiver, watching ecstasy cross her face when he was deep inside her.

Afterwards, they spooned, content to linger in each other’s arms. She didn’t always stay the night, but he hoped she would tonight. She’d had a beer, which was always a positive sign. He fell asleep thinking about a second round of doctor they could play in the early morning hours before she left for work.

Ethan woke to a shrill ringtone that sent adrenalin shooting through his arteries. It was Riptide’s security alarm. He apologized to Jane as he scrambled out of bed in search of his phone. A cyclone had strewn their clothes about. He tripped over his jeans, and his phone dislodged from a pocket, skittering across the floor. The alarm’s message blinked the warning that the main entrance had been breached.

The piercing cry of an arriving siren had him rushing to the window to jerk up the blind. Lights flashed from the

street beyond the alley. A fire truck blasted its horn and rolled past.

“I’ve gotta get down there.” He bent to pick up his clothes. The sirens continued to blare, no doubt waking the whole building. “Sorry, Jane. You don’t need to get up.” She lay on the far side of the bed with her back to the window. He switched on the lamp, sorted out his jeans, and pulled them on. He yanked his T-shirt over his head. Jane still hadn’t stirred.

“Jane?” He reached over and placed his hand on her shoulder. “I’ll be back as—” He pulled his hand away and stared at her skin. The marks she thought had vanished—the blood marks that had mysteriously disappeared—weren’t gone at all; they were blindingly white and glowing beneath her skin.

He crept around to her side of the bed and lifted the hair away from her face. The marks were back, luminous. He paused, staring in disbelief. He pulled the sheet off. All of her marks were back. And she was deeply asleep.

He covered her again and sat there, not knowing what to do, but knowing he couldn’t leave her like that.