

**FACE OF BETRAYAL**  
**A TRIPLE THREAT NOVEL**  
LIS WIEHL with APRIL HENRY

**NORTHWEST PORTLAND**

December 13

“**C**ome on, Jalapeño!”

Katie Converse jerked the dog’s leash. Reluctantly, the black Lab mix lifted his nose and followed her. Katie wanted to hurry, but everything seemed to invite Jalapeño to stop, sniff, and lift his leg. And there was no time for that now. Not today.

She had grown up less than two miles from here, but this afternoon everything looked different. It was winter, for one thing, nearly Christmas. And she wasn’t the same person she had been the last time she was here, not a month earlier. Then she had been a little girl playing at being a grown-up. Now she was a woman.

Finally she reached the agreed-upon spot. She was still shaking from what she had said less than two hours earlier. What she had demanded.

Now there was nothing to do but wait. Not an easy task for an impatient seventeen-year-old.

She heard the scuff of footsteps behind her. Unable to suppress a grin, Katie called his name as she turned around.

At the sight of the face, contorted with rage, Jalapeño growled.

## MARK O. HATFIELD UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE

December 14

**A**s she walked to the courtroom podium, federal prosecutor Allison Pierce touched the tiny silver cross she wore on a fine chain. The cross was hidden under her cream-colored silk blouse, but it was always there, close to Allison's heart. Her father had given it to her for her sixteenth birthday.

Allison was dressed in what she thought of as her "court uniform," a navy blue suit with a skirt that, even on her long legs, hit below the knee. This morning she had tamed her curly brown hair into a low bun and put on small silver hoops. She was thirty-three, but in court she wanted to make sure no one thought of her as young or unseasoned.

She took a deep breath and looked up at Judge Fitzpatrick. "Your Honor, I ask for the maximum sentence for Frank Archer. He coldly, calculatedly, and callously plotted his wife's murder. If Mr. Archer had been dealing with a real hired killer instead of an FBI agent, Toni Archer would be dead today. Instead, she is in hiding and in fear for her life."

A year earlier Frank Archer had had what he told friends was a five-foot-four problem. Toni. She wanted a divorce. Archer was an engineer, and he was good at math. A divorce meant splitting all their worldly goods and paying for child support. But if Toni were to die? Then not only would Archer avoid a divorce settlement, but he would benefit from Toni's \$300,000 life insurance policy.

Archer asked an old friend from high school—who also happened to be an ex-con—if he knew anyone who could help. The old friend found Rod Emerick, but Rod wasn't a hired killer—he was an FBI agent. Archer agreed to meet Rod in a hotel room, which the FBI bugged. In a windowless van parked outside, Allison monitored the grainy blackand-white feed, all shadows and snow, waiting until they had enough to make an

arrest before she gave the order. With gritted teeth, she had watched Archer hand over a snapshot of Toni, her license number, her work schedule, and \$5,000 in fifties and hundreds. She sometimes understood those who killed from passion—but killers motivated by greed left her cold.

Given the strength of the evidence, Archer had had no choice but to plead guilty. Now, as Allison advocated for the maximum possible sentence, she didn't look over at him once. He was a small man, with thinning blond hair and glasses. He looked nothing like a killer. But after five years as a federal prosecutor, Allison had learned that few killers did.

After she finished, she rejoined Rod at the prosecutor's table and listened to the defense attorney's sad litany of excuses. Archer hadn't known what he was doing, he was distraught, he was under a lot of stress, he wasn't sleeping well, and he had never intended to go through with it—lies that everyone in the crowded courtroom could see through.

"Do you have anything you would like to say to the court before sentencing?" Judge Fitzpatrick asked Archer.

Archer got to his feet, eyes brimming with crocodile tears. "I'm very, very sorry. Words cannot describe how I feel. It was all a huge mistake. I love Toni very much."

Allison didn't realize she was shaking her head until she felt Rod's size-twelve loafer squishing the toe of her sensible navy blue pump.

They all rose for the sentence.

"Frank Archer, you have pled guilty to the cowardly and despicable act of plotting to have your spouse murdered." Judge Fitzpatrick's face was like a stone. "Today's sentence should send a strong message to cowards who think they can hide by hiring a stranger to commit an act of violence. I hereby sentence you to ten years for attempted capital murder-for-hire, to be followed by two years of supervised release."

Allison felt a sense of relief. She had an excellent track record, but the previous case she had prosecuted had shaken her confidence. The date rapist had been pronounced innocent, which had left his victim stunned, fearful, and angry—and left Allison feeling guilty that she hadn't been able to put him away for years. Today, at least, she had made the world a safer place.

A second later, her mood was shattered.

“It’s all your fault!” Archer shouted. He wasn’t yelling at Toni—his ex-wife was too afraid to be in the courtroom. Instead he was pointing at Allison and Rod. “You set me up!”

Archer was dragged from the courtroom, and Rod patted Allison’s arm. “Don’t worry,” he said. “We’ll keep an eye on him.”

She nodded and managed a smile. Still she felt a pulse of fear. Ten years from now, would the man come back to take his revenge?

Shaking off the feeling of foreboding, Allison walked out of the courthouse—known to Portlanders as the “Schick Razor Building” because of its curved, overhanging roof—while she called Toni with the good news. In the parking lot, she pressed the fob on her keychain, unlocked her car door, and slid behind the wheel, still talking.

Only after she had accepted Toni’s thanks and said good-bye did she see the folded paper underneath her windshield wiper. Muttering under her breath about junk advertising, she got back out of the car and tugged the paper free.

Then she unfolded it.

The professional part of Allison immediately began to take notes. For one thing, except in a movie, she had never actually seen a threat written in letters cut from a magazine. For another, were her own fingerprints obscuring those of the person who had done this?

But the human side of Allison couldn’t help trembling. For all her detachment, she couldn’t tamp down her horror as she read the message.

I’M GOING TO RAPE YOU. AND YOU’RE GOING TO LIKE IT. AND THEN I’M GOING TO CUT YOU INTO PIECES. AND *I’M* GOING TO LIKE IT.

## **MYSFACE.COM/THEDCPAGE**

*Better not let me talk to boys*

September 5

**H**i! I'm a Senate page on Capitol Hill. This blog will tell about my experiences here in Pageland.

Washington, DC is all tall buildings, honking cabs & humidity that feels like someone wrapped you up in a blanket of steam. Plus it smells funky. Like hot garbage.

It turns out that the Vietnam Memorial & the Washington Monument & the statue of Lincoln are all a couple of blocks apart. My stepmom V has been trying to get me to all the famous sites, even though there will be trips every other weekend just for the pages. (Now she's asleep & I'm writing this in the bathroom of the hotel, which has free wireless.)

I can't believe that the whole time we've been here it's been raining. For some reason, I never thought it would rain in DC. Luckily some guy on the street was selling umbrellas.

After all the sightseeing, we went out to dinner with Senator X. He got me this internship, but I probably won't see him very much. I'll be working for all the senators, especially the 50 Republicans, not just him. (Working in the Senate is better than working in the House. I hear they have to stare at hundreds of photos so they can memorize all the faces & names in their party. Compared to that, 50 is a piece of cake.)

We ate at an elegant Japanese restaurant, where I had many things that I can't pronounce. Not only are the Japanese people good at anime, but they know how to cook.

Before our food came, V told these people at the next table to keep their toddler under control. He had a cup of Cheerios & was throwing some on the floor. So of course she had to boss them around. Then V started telling the senator that he had better keep an

eye on me & not let me talk to boys. I just wanted to crawl under the table, even though they both pretended she was joking.

Doesn't she realize that I'm not a little kid any more? In eight days, I'm going to be seventeen!

## PIERCE RESIDENCE

December 14

Allison set the pregnancy test on the edge of the tub. Marshall was in the living room, stretching in front of the TV news, getting ready to go for a run.

All afternoon, this moment had been in the back of her mind, providing a welcome distraction from her anxiety whenever she thought about the threatening note. Rod had come as soon as she called and had taken the document away as evidence. He asked her if she had any enemies, but they both knew the question was a joke.

Of course Allison had made enemies, most recently Archer. She was a third-generation prosecutor, so she knew it came with the territory.

The so-called “blue collar criminals”—bank robbers and drug dealers—weren’t so bad to deal with. For them, getting caught and doing time was an accepted risk, a cost of doing business. They were professionals, like she was. In a weird way, they understood that Allison was just doing her job.

It was the other ones, the ones who had been fairly upstanding citizens until they snapped at dinner and stabbed their spouse or decided that bank robbery was a perfect way to balance the family budget. Those were the ones you needed to watch out for. Their feelings for Allison were personal. Personal—and dangerous. For now, she would be extra careful, and Rod had alerted the Portland police to make additional patrols past her house.

Her watch said 6:21. She told herself that she wouldn’t pick up the white stick again until 6:30. The test only took three minutes, but she wanted to be sure. How many times had she watched one of these stupid tests, willing two crossed lines to show up in the results window but seeing only one?

“I’ll be back in about forty minutes, honey,” Marshall called from the living room.

She heard the sound of the front door closing.

Allison hadn't told him she was going to take the test today. She was four days late, but she had been four days late before. After so many failed tests, so many months in which being even a day late had filled her with feverish speculation, Marshall no longer inquired too closely into the details.

When they started this journey two years ago, she had been sure that she and Marshall would conceive easily. Any teenager could have a baby. How hard could it be? She and Marshall had always been scrupulous about birth control. Now it seemed like a bitter joke. She had wasted hundreds of dollars preventing something that would never have happened anyway.

They had started trying a month after her thirty-first birthday, giddy to be "playing without a net." At the end of the first month, Allison was sure she was pregnant: her breasts felt different, the taste of food changed, and she often felt dizzy when she stood up. But then her period arrived on schedule.

As the months passed she got more serious, tracked her temperature, made charts. Even though she had read all the statistics about how fertility declined with every passing year, it hadn't seemed like they applied to her.

How many crime victims had she met who had never believed that anything bad could happen to them? Because they were special?

"It's in your hands, Lord," she murmured. The idea was one she struggled with every day, at home and at work. How much was she responsible for? How much was out of her control? She had never been good at letting go.

To distract herself, Allison turned on the small TV they kept in the bedroom on top of an oak highboy. After a Subaru commercial, the Channel Four news anchor said, "And now we have a special bulletin from our crime reporter, Cassidy Shaw. Cassidy?"

Allison's old friend stood in front of a beautiful white Victorian house. She wore a coral suit that set off her blond shoulder-length hair. Her blue eyes looked startlingly topaz—either she was wearing colored contacts or the TV set needed to be adjusted.

"A family is asking for your help in finding a teenager who has been missing from Northwest Portland since yesterday afternoon," Cassidy said, wearing the expression reporters reserved for serious events. "Seventeen-year-old Katie Converse left her parents a note saying she was taking the family dog for a walk—and she has not been

seen since. Here's a recent photo of Katie, who is on winter break from the United States Senate's page program."

The camera cut to a photograph of a pretty blond girl with a snub nose and a dusting of freckles. Allison caught her breath. Even though Katie was blond and Lindsay had dark hair, it was almost like looking at her sister when she was Katie's age. The nose was the same, the shape of her eyes, even the same shy half smile. Lindsay, back when she was young and innocent and full of life.

Cassidy continued, "Katie is five feet, two inches tall and weighs 105 pounds. She has blue eyes, blond hair, and freckles. She was last seen wearing a black sweater, blue jeans, a navy blue Columbia parka, and Nike tennis shoes. The dog, named Jalapeño, is a black Lab mix.

"Authorities are investigating. The family asks that if you have seen Katie, to please call the number on your screen. This is Cassidy Shaw, reporting from Northwest Portland."

Allison said a quick prayer that the girl would be safe. But a young woman like that would have no reason to run away, not if she was already living away from home. Nor was she likely to be out partying. Allison knew a little bit about the page program. It was fiercely competitive, attracting smart, serious college-bound students whose idea of fun was the mock state legislature. The kind of kid Allison had been, back when she and Cassidy were in high school.

She looked at her watch and was surprised to see it was already 6:29. She made herself wait until the clock clicked over to 6:30, then reached for the pregnancy test. The first time she had bought only one, sure that was all she would need. Now, two years later, she bought them in multi-packs at Costco.

In the control window was a pink horizontal line. And in the other window, the results window, was a pink crosshairs.

Not single pink lines in both windows.

She was pregnant.

## PORTLAND FBI HEADQUARTERS

December 15

**T**he words popped up on FBI special agent Nicole Hedges's screen.

PDXer: WHATS UR FAVORITE SUBJECT?

Nic—using the screen name BubbleBeth—and some guy going by the name PDXer were in a private area of a chat room called Younger Girls/Older Men.

BubbleBeth: LUNCH

It was what Nic always answered. She could disconnect from her fingers, from the reality behind her keyboard and the words that appeared on her screen. Which was good. Because if she thought about it too much, she would go crazy.

At first working for Innocent Images, the FBI's cyber crime squad's effort to take down online predators, had seemed like a perfect fit. Regular hours, which were kind of a must when you were a single parent. The downside was that she spent all day exposed to vile men eager to have sex with a girl who barely qualified as a teen.

Most people were surprised that it wasn't the creepy guy in the raincoat who went online trolling for young girls. If only. In real life it was the teacher, the doctor, the grandpa, the restaurant manager. The average offender was a professional white male aged twenty-five to forty-five.

PDXer: HOW OLD RU?

BubbleBeth: 13

In Oregon, eighteen was the age of consent. But prosecutors preferred to keep it clear-cut to make it easier for the jury to convict. So Nic told the guys she met online that she was thirteen or fourteen, never older. Some typed L8R—later—as soon as Nic told them her imaginary age. For the rest, it was like throwing a piece of raw meat into a dog kennel.

PDXer: KEWL

Surveys had shown that one in seven kids had received an online sexual solicitation in the past year. It was Nic's job to find the places where the chances weren't one in seven, but 100 percent, which meant going to chat rooms.

Sure, that kind of thing happened on MySpace, but the FBI didn't have the time to put together pages that would fool anyone. They never looked as good as the real thing. Real kids spent hours on their MySpaces, tweaking them with photos and music and blogs. Real predators went there, too, but it was hard to catch them without some kind of tip.

But there were plenty of chat rooms. Nic's being there was predicated on the chat room name (Not Too Young to Have Fun, for example) or a kid's report of having been solicited.

Sometimes she took over from a true victim, but usually she just started out fresh—went into a chat room and announced her presence. The first thing you noticed upon entering a chat room was the absence of any actual chat. The point of being there was to start up a private conversation. It never took longer than five or ten minutes before someone approached her.

PDXer: R UR PARENTS TOGETHER?

BubbleBeth: NO. I LIVE W/MY MOM. ONLY C DAD SOMETIMES.

It was what she always said. Guys like PDXer loved kids with one parent and unfettered access to the Internet. It was like that line in *Casablanca*. *This could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.*

PDXer: DO YOU HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS?

BubbleBeth: 1. SHES 3.

Young enough that Nicole's imaginary mom would have her hands full.

Nic let Makayla play Neopets online. But only when she was in the room with her. And her daughter knew that at any time her mom could come to her and ask to see what she was typing, and Makayla would have to show her right away.

PDXer: R U A COP?

Nic smiled. *Got ya.*

BubbleBeth: NO!

Nic went on answering PDXer's questions, not even paying that much attention. It was better if she didn't. Didn't think about this sick jerk sinking his hooks into a girl. Grooming her. If she didn't wonder how many there had been before her. Girls who really *were* thirteen or fourteen.

PDXer: CAN U SEND ME A PIC?

Since they never used pictures of real kids, Nic would send him a picture of herself, morphed back to look like she was thirteen. The morphing wasn't accurate because it didn't take into account three years of braces and four pulled teeth. When she had really been BubbleBeth's age, everyone had made fun of her buckteeth.

PDXer: WANT 2 GO 2 A MOVIE SOMETIME?

BubbleBeth: SURE, THAT WOULD BE COOL.

Nic had to backspace and retype the last words, changing them to B KEWL.

PDXer: ANYTHING U REALLY WANT TO C?

BubbleBeth: MEAT MARKET.

It was rated R, which meant technically she couldn't get in. Well, BubbleBeth couldn't. Sometimes Nic forgot to distance herself. She wasn't thirteen, she wasn't going to school, she didn't fight with her mom.

PDXer: GR8. RU WEARING ANY UNDIES RIGHT NOW?

*Bingo.*

## CHANNEL FOUR

December 15

**W**ith varying degrees of dread, TV crime reporter Cassidy Shaw and five other people seated in swivel chairs in Channel Four’s dressing room watched Jessica Lear. Jessica was a high-definition makeup consultant the station had flown up from LA to teach them how to prepare for the HD era.

HD was five times sharper than regular TV. That meant every line, spot, and lopsided lip would be in sharp focus. You could even see nose hairs, which made Cassidy shudder just to think about it.

HD also allowed TV sets to show more colors. For years government standards had limited the range of colors available to broadcasters. But HD allowed the use of some formerly forbidden shades of red. That meant that every blotch, pimple, and tiny broken vein showed up on-screen with the brutal clarity of a surgery textbook.

When she first started out on TV, Cassidy had been taught that she needed to define her face with eyeliner, eyebrow pencil, lip liner, blush, etc. It was almost like paint-by-number. Because studio lights made everyone look pale and washed out, the end result still looked natural on screen. But that era had come to an end. It had started with the national programs, but as more and more viewers made the switch to HD, it had begun filtering down to all the regional markets—including Portland.

Now all of the on-camera talent had been gathered in the dressing room for a makeup application lesson. After the consultant left, they would be on their own. The guys were used to a quick swipe of pancake to hide five o’clock shadow. The men who worked in the field weren’t even asked to do that. But now everyone—anchors, reporters, even the weather and sports guys—needed to learn how to look good on the new high-definition sets.

Jessica, who could have been any age from thirty to fifty, said, “Traditional makeup looks too theatrical in HD. It looks cakey and fake. But wearing no makeup at all would look”—she paused while she found a diplomatic term—“*distracting*.”

*Old*, Cassidy translated. *Old and ugly*. And Cassidy was determined never to be old and ugly.

Her parents had raised her to believe that being beautiful was a woman’s top priority. Good grades had meant little to them, but let Cassidy gain five pounds or go without makeup, and she had heard about it. Her bone-deep determination to stay beautiful was what kept her a size 2—well, maybe a 4, if she was being honest, but she was a size 2 on her good days.

The drive not to be old and ugly got her butt into a spinning class six days a week. It made her go to the dermatologist for another round of Botox and laser treatments. It led to regular trips to the nail salon, hair salon, and spray-on tan place. It maxed out her credit card. But it was better than the alternative.

“This is an arms race,” Jessica said. “We’d all like to go back to the old days. But we need new weapons. We can’t slap on powder when every grain looks like a boulder.”

“What about plastic surgery?” asked anchor Brad Buffet (Boo-fay, as he insisted on pronouncing it). He turned sideways to regard his sagging jowls.

Jessica shook her head. “That’s iffy too. In HD, when you’ve had work done, you can actually see the seams. You could end up looking like Frankenstein.”

“So basically, this is like being naked,” Anne Forster, another reporter, complained.

“It’s only like being naked if you don’t learn how to cover everything up,” Jessica said, and then named a big star in movie comedies. “On regular TV, she still looks great, as sexy as ever. But in HD, she’s nothing but a mass of wrinkles and unfortunate pockmarks.”

Cassidy leaned closer to the mirror. In HD, the faint wrinkles at the corner of her eyes would probably look like folds of origami and her pores like giant shell-blasted craters.

“So,” Jessica said, holding up a metal gizmo about six inches long with an open bowl on the top to hold liquid, “we airbrush.” The applicator looked like something a house painter might use to paint the home of an elf. “Can I have a volunteer?”

Cassidy was the first to wave a hand in the air. After pinning back her hair, Jessica told her to close her eyes and hold her breath. The air compressor fired up, making a weird bubbling sound as it aerated the liquid.

Two minutes later Cassidy was so close to the mirror she could kiss it, the way she used to do when she was twelve and desperately wanted a boyfriend. Her skin looked perfect, a flawless sunny beige. No wrinkles, no bumps, no broken veins, no blemishes. It was all still there, of course, but it was now covered with a very thin layer of paint.

*If Richard Nixon had had this, Cassidy thought, Kennedy would never have been elected.*