



TWISTED

DECEPTION



ISABELLA

SUMMARY

Addie Blake's life isn't black and white—more like a series of short bursts of color that sustain her until the next eruption. She isn't a ladder-climber in the corporate world. Instead, she works long hours at the office and even at home, something her mechanic girlfriend, Drake Hogan, can't stand. If Addie can't focus on Drake, then Drake finds arm candy that will. After a long week of late nights and a series of text-messaged demands, each one a bigger bomb than the last, Addie has had enough of her Motor Girl.

Greyson Hollister inhabits a world where everything is either black and white, or money green. She's a polished, certified workaholic. As head of Integrated Financial, she has built the ladder others want to climb. Now she intends to attend a business mixer to confront a rumormonger and kill merger rumors involving her company.

Detective Nancy Hill, the lead detective on the Elevator Rapist task force, has just been called in to investigate an attack at Integrated Financial. She can't quite put her finger on it, but something doesn't add up with this latest assault, and Greyson Hollister isn't exactly lending a helping hand.

A storm's brewing on the horizon. Can Addie and Greyson weather it, or will it blow them over?

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SAPPHIRE BOOKS
SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

Twisted Deception

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Dedication

To Schileen

Forever my love!

Acknowledgments

It takes a village to put out a book.

Thank you to that village - Shelley, Peggy, Lori, and others who wish to be just part of the process.

To my family, Sapphire and personal. You make it all worthwhile.

To the readers who keep reading my stories. Thank you just doesn't seem to be enough for all
you've given me.

Prologue

Six minutes left to get this done before security made their rounds on the floor. His fillings tingled as he shoved a penlight between his lips and traced paths on the diagram. He snuck a glance at his watch. Three minutes to finish.

With surgical precision, he wove the tips of the snips between the assorted colors of wires, pulled two, and cut them to the camera system. Attaching a new set of wires, he pulled a remote from his pocket to test the box he'd subbed in. A green light flashed to red, then back again, as he reset the signal. Two minutes to spare.

Pocketing his tools, he slipped the door closed and gently set the latch in place. He tossed the plans, flashlight, and snips into his briefcase, adjusted his tie, then looked out the slim window in the door. One minute.

As he eased out into the hallway, he pulled the door shut behind him and casually walked down the hall as if he worked at Integrated Financial.

Chapter One

Time wasn't on Addie's side and Paul wasn't helping. Neither were the texts from her girlfriend.

10:30—*Geez I'm starving. When r u getting home?*

"Is that Drake?" Paul asked, stuffing papers into his already bulging briefcase.

Addie wondered how much longer the poor imitation snakeskin could take the abuse. Only one latch kept the battered beast closed. The hinges often popped open at will, and Paul had strewn his work all over more than once when they were walking to work. Addie had to keep pedestrians from stepping on his client prospectuses. He probably didn't have a better briefcase for the same reason he didn't have a girlfriend. Paul was usually a little clueless. Addie liked him in spite of it. Or, perhaps, because of it.

She stared at the glowing screen of her cell, then hesitantly tapped it. If too much time went by, Drake would text again. The second one would be a shouting text.

10:40—*Leaving now. ☺*

"You want to get a drink?" Paul asked. "Or doesn't your ball and chain stretch that far?"

Addie rolled her eyes as she shut down her computer and gathered her purse. If she sat, she couldn't see over the half wall that kept her and Paul separated. She bumped her hip against the file-cabinet drawer, closing it. While it wasn't an office per se, the walls offered enough privacy from prying eyes that Addie could shop for her favorite shoes online every once in a while. "This from the man who'd kill for a ball. Or a chain," she said as she cast Paul a glance that, if he *had* a wife, he would have recognized instantly as a *don't fuck with me* look.

Heading home to Drake, the girlfriend who could barely afford to take her out for sushi, made her headache from a long day of crunching numbers even worse.

"I'll take that as a yes. O'Malley's Pub?" Paul pressed his luck. "You know you love their fries."

"Twist my arm. Let me tell Drake I'll be late." Even as Addie typed, she had a feeling what the reply would be.

10:42—*Change of plans. Meet me at O'Malley's pub.*

10:43—*WTF? Are u kidding me. I'm going to bed. Don't wake me when you get in. Pillow on couch.*

Addie sighed and Paul stole a look at the reply.

“Shocker.” He groaned. “Aren’t you tired of her crap yet? Or just tired of sleeping on the couch?”

Drake worked hard and had no problem staying out late with the guys from the garage. But if Addie did the same, Drake hit the ceiling. Besides, it was her apartment. And she’d had it with the couch.

“Guess it’s just us.”

“Good! We always have a better time without your little grease monkey.” Paul threaded his arm around Addie’s waist. “God, are you losing weight?”

“No, not really,” she lied. Drake had made some harsh comments about Addie’s figure, and she had made a point of not eating around Drake, who watched everything she put in her own mouth. Addie had been proud of her swimmer’s body. Soft in all the right places but fit. Yet she didn’t compare to the pin-up girls that draped themselves on Drake when she was at a race. She didn’t have a clue what Drake saw in her, and it was starting to be painfully obvious that Drake had a type and she wasn’t it, yet.

Paul smiled and tapped his watch. He wasn’t a man’s man. He was the type that would make your mom happy. Slim, well-groomed, and polite as hell. Why couldn’t she like guys, or at least guys like Paul? What did they call a man who hung around lesbians?

“Bullshit. Ever since you’ve been dating Motor Girl, you’ve gotten skinnier and skinnier. By next month, you’ll be down to your birth weight. Don’t make me stage an intervention.”

Addie’s phone vibrated in her hand, as if Drake had overheard them.

10:48—Goin 2 my place instd. Gotta race 2mrrw.

10:48—Fine. Maybe you’ll be in a better mood tomorrow.

The bomb she’d just lobbed would probably blow up in her face tomorrow after Drake’s race, but she was beyond caring at the moment. It was Friday night, and she’d worked over sixty hours that week. She needed a glass of wine. Or a shot. Or both.

Addie found herself stuffing her own briefcase past the point of closing too. It didn’t matter. She’d broken the zipper a long time ago.

Taking work home was requisite if you wanted to keep your job at Integrated Financial Services. They weren’t just the top brokerage firm in San Jose. Integrated Financial had practically predicted the economic collapse within a few weeks. That alone placed them in the top ranking of stockbrokers.

Above Addie, a bank of clocks set to times around the world loomed, ticking silently. They were critical. If someone wasn’t careful, it was easy to put the wrong time down on a sell order and screw a client out of major money. Addie had sat there on many a night, watching the bright-red second hand crawl slowly around the face of the clocks, just waiting for them to hit a sell time.

But not tonight.

“Let’s get out of here,” Addie declared.

Paul summarily pushed his desk chair in. “Don’t have to tell me twice. Let’s make a night of it. We’ll stay up late, then go to the Waffle House in the morning and get fried chicken and gravy.”

“Is that another hint about my weight?”

“I’m pretty subtle, right?” he said, snapping off the lights to the office they’d shared for over a year and leaving Addie in the dark.

“Yup. Subtle.”

Paul could be a pain, but he was always good to her. They were both hanging on by their fingertips to every rung they’d climbed on the corporate ladder at Integrated. However, he’d never tried to edge her out for a promotion, cut her out of a deal, or even hit on her. Addie knew she had a true friend in him so she wanted to return the favor.

Following him out into the hall, she added, “Tell you what. I’m going to text my friend Tara. She should be getting off work right about now.”

11:00—Heading 2 O’Malley’s pub. Join? Want u 2 meet someone.

11:01—You finally dumped that biiiioottccch, Drake?!? Can’t wait to meet your new squeeze. C ya in a few!

Misunderstanding aside, Addie announced, “You’re welcome.”

“For what?” Paul asked.

“Tara will meet us at O’Malley’s. She’s just your type. Hard-working. No life. Likes Chinese takeout right out of the box. And doesn’t like commitment.”

“My dream woman!”

Her phone vibrated in her hand again. Afraid it was Drake, Addie ignored it.

Paul pushed the office’s main door open, the Integrated Financial logo’s emblazoned boldly on the glass, and waited for Addie to walk past. “Bet Motor Girl doesn’t do that for you, does she?”

Addie elbowed him in the stomach. “Stop. She’s not that bad.”

Suddenly, she remembered that she’d forgotten the file she was supposed to work on that weekend. Drake hated it when she brought paperwork home, as if it was an insult to her and the quality time they were supposed to be spending together. But the days of Saturday-morning hikes and fun Sunday brunches were long gone, replaced by arguments over leftover pizza and pretending to still be asleep when the sun rose so they didn’t have to talk.

“I’ll meet you in the garage and we can argue who gets to drive.”

“Not if I’m already in the car waiting for your slow ass. Besides, I’m the designated driver tonight. I don’t want to make a jerk out of myself if your friend is hot.”

“She’s definitely hot. And you’ll make an ass out of yourself regardless. Meet you in the garage in five after I get that file.”

Paul strode down the long corridor and hopped into an open elevator as Addie's phone vibrated yet again. Steeling herself, she tapped the screen.

11:14—Leaving now. C u in a few.

At the sight of Tara's text, Addie relaxed.

11:14—C u in about 10.

Addie typed in her pass code at the main door for reentry. Integrated had become serious about security after a hacker had nearly breached their firewall earlier that year. She looked up at the new security camera pointed right at her. She should feel safer, but the idea of Big Brother watching, well, it had people talking. Padlocks on the supply cabinet wouldn't have surprised her. Things had been tense at the office since then, but it was more because of the merger rumors swirling. She didn't want to think what that would mean for her job. She had heavier things on her mind at the moment.

Snaking through the darkened offices and half cubicles, she reached hers, snatched the file from her desk drawer, then tucked it under her arm and read another text from Tara. Was this what her life amounted to after so many long hours and grueling days on the job?

11:15—I need a double. C u in five.

Addie slipped her head through her briefcase strap, shrugged it across her chest, and tucked her purse under her arm so she could keep texting. Lately, it was the only way she could keep up with family and friends. Lucky for her, her mother had recently started to respond to texts. Little snippets of niceties between them throughout the week had replaced the long Sunday phone calls. Nice!

Addie rushed out of the office for the elevator. Lucky for her it was waiting.

11:16—Not intro-ing you to a girl. Want you to meet my coworker, Paul. Nice guy.

The elevator dinged, stopped, and the doors slid open. Addie caught sight of a man out of the corner of her eye but didn't give him a second thought. Integrated had a reputation. Staying late wasn't just the norm. It was almost mandatory. You worked long hard hours and hoped your boss took notice.

"Good evening," he said in a deep voice she didn't recognize.

"Hey." She didn't bother to look up from her phone. She kept it brief, not wanting to encourage more conversation. Addie read Tara's latest text.

11:18—He better be. That last guy you wanted me to meet was a d-bag.

“So, working late, huh?” the man said.

Addie cast a glance in his direction, discreetly checking him out in the highly polished brass wall of the elevator. His suit stretched across the huge expanse of his chest, the buttons of the vest looking like they’d pop at any minute. Spit-shined wingtips looked out of character for some reason. His beefy hands clenched and then relaxed. No briefcase. Odd. Everyone had a briefcase at I.F.

Not wanting to be rude, she answered, “Yeah. You?”

“The hard-ass boss, but I’m sure I don’t have to tell you. You work on the twenty-third floor, right? I’ve seen you in the cafeteria a couple of times.”

Addie could feel his gaze crawling over her from head to toe. In that tight space of the elevator, it was unnerving.

11:19—Gotta stop txtn. A guy got on the elevator and he’s looking over my shoulder, TTYL.

“It’s a job, right?” he said.

Addie tucked her phone in her pocket as the man shuffled closer. She stepped back as he crowded her at the panel. As he stuck two fingers out, a scar across the first two knuckles caught her attention. She heard a loud click at the same time he pushed a floor that meant he would get off before her. His hand lingered on the panel and she caught a whiff of a strange scent. Mothballs, she thought. She remembered her grandmother’s house smelling the same way.

“Wow, you smell good. What’s the name of that perfume you’re wearing? I’d love to get some for my wife.”

He still stood too close for her comfort, so she started to step to the back of the elevator. Before she could put space between them, Addie felt herself pushed up against the wall.

“Think you’re too good to talk to me?” He was close enough that she smelled stale nicotine on his breath. Without warning, he bashed her against the wall, instantly splitting her lip. Blood seeped into her mouth. “You should’ve been nicer.”

She tried to push off the wall, but he forced his body against hers. If she could get turned around maybe she had a fighting chance. She felt herself being pulled back by the strap of her briefcase. In a second, she was thrown down to the ground. The pain from her face making contact with the floor almost made her black out.

Her mind was screaming, Fight, Addie! Fight!

Arching her back, she shifted her hips as she tried to roll her attacker off her. A glint of silver briefly caught her eye. Next, she felt the pressure of the briefcase strap release. He tossed the case into the corner of the elevator and jerked her around on her back, face-to-face with her attacker. Her phone buzzed.

Reaching up, Addie tried to shove his massive weight off her, but he grabbed her wrists and pushed them back. His face was close, sweat dripping on her. Without thinking, she rammed her

head against his nose. Her forehead made contact with something that snapped. His blood splattered all over her cheeks as he bellowed, “You little bitch...”

She bucked her hips, trying to toss him off, and he let go of one of her hands to clutch his wounded nose. Instinctively, she raked his face with her fingernails.

“Uargh,” he screamed, reaching for the furrow marks her nails had drawn. He straddled her hips, waving the knife blade in front of her. “Fight me and I’ll kill you. Understand?” He lowered his face closer. “I know where you live.”

He reached across her, grabbed her arm, and flung her onto her stomach. His thick fingers threaded into her hair, yanking her head back. He pushed her dress up, and the snap of the elastic waistband being cut echoed in the small confines. The tip of the blade caught the flesh of her butt, and she yelped. A trickle of hot blood rolled down her thigh.

“Stop struggling and you won’t get hurt.”

“Fuck you.”

“Oh, I plan on it. You just made it interesting.”

A meaty fist clocked the side of her head, and the edges of blackness started to encroach on her. Fighting to stay awake, she heard her phone buzz again. It was always in her hand, except now when she needed it most. The elevator jerked from its stop and started moving, and then everything went black as more excruciating pain lanced through her skull. Black and quiet.

A scream wrenched her from the darkness.

“Addie! Addie, what happened?” She could hear Paul but couldn’t see him. Her eyes were practically swollen shut.

She tried to sit up, but her body wasn’t cooperating and her head was throbbing.

“Don’t move. An ambulance is on its way. Addie, who did this to you?”

Flickers of memory like the ticking frames of a silent movie flashed behind her closed eyes. Her aching body confirming what she could imagine was only a nightmare. The stranger had attacked her.

“Christ,” she heard him mutter under his breath. “Stay with me, Addie. Help’s on the way.”

Two minutes, she’d just needed two minutes to get that file and they could have been sitting at the bar. Paul pulled his coat off and covered her as she started to shake. “Oh God, Addie. Who did this to you?” he said again. Behind him stood two women in cleaning aprons, their carts full of maintenance supplies pushed to the side by the bank of elevators. Addie didn’t know how she’d gotten into the foyer of the building.

Her vision cleared, and she licked her bloody lips. “I don’t know. I’ve never seen him before.”

“Can I do something, sir?” one of the cleaning women asked, standing at a respectful distance. Her graying hair was scraped up into a hasty bun, a concerned look on her aging face.

“I think we all just need to stay here and wait for the police to show up.”

The second one piped up. “Yes, yes, but I have to do my job, or I could get fired.” She was younger, a dark ponytail swinging as she whispered something to her coworker that neither Addie nor Paul was meant to hear.

“I’ll talk to your boss. Besides, you found her, and the cops will want to talk to you both. Did you see anyone get off the elevator?”

The cleaning women swapped glances and shook their heads at the same time.

“No, no, we didn’t see anything. Sorry.” The younger one nervously twisted a rag between her hands, wringing it out as a siren pierced the tension.

“Oh, the police are here. I’ll go and bring them, yes?” one of the women said.

Addie dug her nails into the back of her arms as she rocked back and forth. Pain suddenly felt good. It kept her focused in the moment, keeping some modicum of clarity from slipping away. Footfalls echoed in the distance. Not the rushed steps of someone in a hurry to get away, but the casual pace of someone daring them to find him. The doors swished open, pushing the smell of nicotine into the small gathering.

Chapter Two

“How are you?” It took everything Greyson Hollister had not to return the vise-like handshake from the man she knew was spreading the takeover rumors. The conference center hummed from all the glad-handing going on around her. She was sure her next comment would pass without notice, except for its intended target.

“Good to see ya, Greyson. Sorry about your father.”

“Thanks.” She pulled her hand back and gently jerked him toward her. “Cut out the bullshit takeover rumors.” Her voice was menacing now that no one could hear them. “You know I own controlling interest in Integrated Financial, and I’m not selling,” she whispered. For good measure, she pecked him on the cheek. “Otherwise, I’ll go to the FCC on that little trade issue with Markham Holdings.” He paled as she patted him on the shoulder. Squeezing his hand harder, she wished she could crush it and the man at the same time. “Didn’t think I knew?”

“It isn’t me, Greyson.” He dropped her hand and stepped back, putting some critical distance between them.

“You’ve been warned.”

Greyson walked past him and toward the bar. She needed a drink. All of this pressing the flesh, as her father called it, left her with a sore hand, indigestion, and the need for a shower to get the scum off her.

“The price of doing business, princess,” he said. She watched him soak in the energy of the hive as people milled about schmoozing and puckering.

It was a memory best left to yesteryear.

Flexing her hand, she nodded her thanks to the bartender as she tipped her two fingers of bourbon and savored the fire coating her throat. The burn was more refreshing than a cool drink of water and just as soothing. She’d accomplished her mission tonight: kill the takeover talk.

“Ms. Hollister, there’s been an incident at the office,” a man whispered in her ear.

For Greyson Hollister, men were like earrings or purses: nothing more than an accessory that she could switch out from time to time. Lately, though, she’d forgotten to trade her latest accessory for a new one. Jarrod Bennet, her pseudo-date for the night and her never-late assistant, always had bad timing.

She didn’t let her smile waver as she scanned the room and waved at someone without missing a beat. She never lowered her guard, and the recent economic troubles only made her persevere. Bad news rarely ruffled her feathers. She poked a strand of hair back into a tight all-business bun that was giving her a splitting headache.

“Did you hear me?”

“I did. You said there’s been an incident at the office. What kind?” Taking another sip of her bourbon, she let its peaty taste linger on her tongue. “I assume you can handle this, Jarrod. I pay you enough.”

“I’m afraid this is a little out of my wheelhouse, Ms. Hollister.” Jarrod pulled at his necktie, trying to loosen the knot. Clearly he *was* out of his element. “The police called and would like to speak with you.”

Greyson narrowed her eyes. A sideways glance at Jarrod’s sullen face almost made her smile. “Police? Was there a break-in?” Briefly exchanging niceties as another patron slid past her, she said, “If so, call the insurance company. They’ll send a rep out—”

“There was a rape.”

“What?” Greyson straightened as if her spine had suddenly fused itself. She tried to conceal the shock as another constituent approached. Now Jarrod had her full attention as she finished the handshake and pulled him away from the crowd.

“Someone was raped in the building,” he repeated, pulling his necktie looser.

“When?”

Jarrod peeked down at his watch. “Around ten thirty. They’re taking the victim to Mercy General.”

“Who?”

“Addie Blake. She’s an analyst down in accounting. Seems she and Paul Winston were pulling a late night to bring in the quarterlies on time.”

She knew Addie Blake from division meetings. Addie Blake was a mouse of a gal. Soft-spoken, hard worker, smart. She didn’t speak often during meetings, something Greyson appreciated when others were too chatty. What she did contribute was thoughtful and concise. Just the kind of worker Greyson liked. She’d taken an interest in Addie Blake, especially after seeing her leaving just as many a late night as Greyson did. Greyson found that admirable in a cutthroat world of corporate suits who’d knife their coworkers, especially if it meant a bigger piece of the pie or face time with the boss. Corporate greed. It fueled the world of high finance. Towers filled with testosterone, scotch, and bitches. Greyson wasn’t the corporate bitch, but she was the top bitch.

Greyson suddenly felt sick. “Please tell me they have the suspect?” Setting her drink on the table, she glanced at Jarrod but knew his answer wouldn’t be good.

He shook his head, cast his eyes down, and buttoned his jacket. “I’ll get your coat and have the car brought around if you want to make your apologies to the guests.”

“Excuse me?” Greyson furrowed her brows. She didn’t tolerate a man telling her what to do. Especially a subordinate. Jarrod kept other men at bay and provided enough cover that relationship questions were nonexistent. Lately, though, he’d tried to cross the line into paramour. She’d been on track to yank the proverbial rug right out from under him tonight before he shared this tragic news. “Are you telling me what to do?”

Jarrod shrank. “No, no, of course not. I’m sorry. I just...I mean...I thought you’d want to handle this personally. I mean, we’ve never had something like this happen at Integrated Financial. I can call someone from Legal if you’d rather not be bothered.”

“We?”

“I don’t mean ‘we’ as in you and me. I just meant the big ‘we.’” He was blathering, making a small circular, almost unnoticeable, gesture with his hands.

“Have my car brought around and find out what hospital Ms. Blake is in.”

“The police have asked to speak with you.”

“Call Legal and let them know what’s going on. I’ll ask Neil to meet me at the hospital.”

Neil Harris was her personal attorney. He was cutthroat, efficient, and well-connected—the only person she trusted. His advice had become invaluable of late.

“Of course. Would you like me to drive you?”

Greyson spied an opportunity and pounced on it. “Jarrod, there is no ‘we.’ You’re my assistant. If I’ve led you to believe anything else existed between us, that’s only in your head,” she said sternly as they walked toward the coatroom. She’d shot him down repeatedly and almost felt sorry for him—almost. She compensated him well for his extracurricular help. If she knew Jarrod, they would do this dance again in about a month.

She really should let him go, and eventually she would, but at this moment she was kicking it into damage control. She’d handle Jarrod later. “Now, I’m sure you can find a taxi home. Can’t you?” She pushed through the doors, leaving him fumbling for a response. Snatching her keys from the valet, she raced to her car, barely hearing Jarrod curse and then respond.

“Of course.” The venom dripping from his voice might have concerned her if she’d hesitated a moment longer.



The fog wrapped around the departing SUV like a protective cape. He smirked. It would only be a matter of time before he took a bite out of that apple. Until then he would just have to satisfy his appetite with another juicy morsel. Walking back into the convention center, he fingered the razor-sharp stiletto in his pocket. It was begging for release, and he was more than happy to oblige.

“Hey, did you forget something?” asked a waitress loaded down with a tray of dirty glasses.

She’d been shaking her ass in his face all night, and he’d more than noticed. He’d waited patiently until they could be alone.

“Yeah. I think I left my cigar case inside. Mind if I check?”

Her eyes smiled as she looked him up and down. Clearly she was appreciating his tailored appearance.

“Sure. If you can’t find it there, go to the coat check. It’s also the lost-and-found.” She pressed the button on the service elevator.

As it opened, he followed her in. “Here. Let me help you with that,” he said, pressing the down button and watching the door slide closed. If only she could see the feral grin spread across his lips. Tonight was going to be a great night, he thought as he caressed his stiletto.

Chapter Three

“I want to go home, Paul. *Please*, take me home,” Addie pleaded before curling into him as she sat on the cold marble floor.

“Addie, I’m so sorry.”

A loud commotion sounded outside the foyer of Integrated Financial. Cleaning carts being pushed and a woman’s command to stop made everyone freeze.

“Charlie One on scene. Can you send Medical? I have at least one female vic—roger.”

Addie caught a flash of the badge on the woman’s dark-blue uniform. “Can I have everyone step back, please?”

Addie jerked Paul down, keeping him rooted next to her

“You too, sir.”

“I’m her friend, Paul Winston. I’m not leaving her alone,” Paul said. “Besides, the other officer that was just here told me to stay where I was.”

“What other officer?” The cop looked around the small confined area.

“He just went that way.” Paul pointed to the lobby of I.F. “Said he saw someone running out of the building.”

The cleaning women parroted Paul’s actions and pointed toward the front, too.

“Dispatch, do you have another officer reporting on scene?” Before she got a reply she reprimanded Paul again. “Sir, you’re standing right in the middle of a crime scene that you’ve just contaminated. Step out.” It wasn’t a request. It was a command that demanded action.

“Actually, I think the crime scene is in there. We found her lying here.” Paul’s tone deepened as he stood

“Paul...” Addie needed a lifeline.

“Ma’am, he’ll be right over there. Okay? I need him to leave while I ask you some questions.” The officer pierced Paul with a glance.

“I’m not going anywhere. This is one of my closest friends, and she needs someone.” Paul planted his hands firmly on his hips.

“I’ll arrest you for obstruction. Is that how you want to help your friend?” The officer took a step closer to Paul, but he didn’t waver.

“Paul, it’s okay.”

“Okay, but I’ll be right over there. You just yell if you need me. I’ll call Drake.”

“No...no...I...I...don’t want you to.” That was all she needed. Her mind was already reeling. An out-of-control girlfriend would only add to her anxiety. Besides, Drake wasn’t the warm-and-fuzzy type. She’d witnessed Drake scrape layers of skin off her knuckles working on her car and barely let a curse word fly, then continue working. If the sight of Drake’s own blood didn’t get a response, Addie doubted seeing her battered face would.

“Ma’am, can you tell me who did this to you?” The officer glanced away before Addie could say anything, pulling at the mic on her shoulder. “I need additional units to Integrated Financial. Perp could still be in the building.”

“We told you there was another policeman here a few minutes ago,” Paul reminded the officer.

Addie stiffened as the words connected. She hadn’t thought of that. Her attacker could still be nearby. A scream sat poised on her lips.

“Ma’am, I’m Officer Torres.” The woman ignored Paul and softened her voice this time. “I’m sorry, but I have to ask this. Were you raped?”

Addie flinched. She couldn’t bear to look at the officer, much less answer her question. She’d asked for this, hadn’t she? The man had said as much when he attacked her.

“Think you’re too good to talk to me?”

“You should’ve been nicer.”

Addie trembled. He’d wanted to kill her.

“Fight me and I’ll kill you. Understand?” His face had been inches away from hers. *“I know where you live.”*

“Oh, God. He knows where I live.” Addie’s shrill voice punctured the vibrating air in the foyer.

“We’re not going to let that happen, Ms...” Officer Torres stumbled for a name.

Addie didn’t offer hers, so Paul piped up. “Addie, Addie Blake.”

“Ms. Blake, we aren’t going to let anything happen to you.”

“How can you stop him? You couldn’t protect me here.” Addie looked around the room and pointed at the cameras. “They couldn’t protect me.” Addie screamed, “Paul, get me out of here.” She tried to stand, but her body wasn’t cooperating, and her jerky movements kept her from getting any purchase on the floor.

“Ms. Blake, please. You’re safe now. Let me ask you some questions, and then we can get you out of here the minute the ambulance arrives. Okay? Can we do that? The sooner I can get a B.O.L.O. out, the better our chances of catching him are. You don’t want him to do this to someone else, do you?”

Glancing down at her clothing, she saw that her stockings were shredded and there was blood all over. The floor was littered with her belongings—coat, shoes, and briefcase. Her mouth was dry, and her lips were cracked and bleeding. She ran her tongue over her teeth just to make sure none were missing and felt the stinging pain where his knife had nicked her ass. Addie shook her head. No, she didn’t want another woman to go through this hell.

“Are you sure?”

Addie could only nod.

“Okay. So, did you lose consciousness at any point in the attack?”

Addie searched the elevator as if it would cough up the answers it had witnessed. Her mind wandered. What had just happened? “Could you repeat the question?”

“Did you black out at any point during the attack?” Officer Torres spoke more slowly this time.

Addie focused on the officer’s shoes and blew out a painful breath before answering.

“At one point he hit me so hard...” She grabbed her head. “I think I blacked out, but...” She squinted, then shielded her eyes. The bright light of the foyer was making her headache worse. “But only briefly, I think.”

“Okay, can you give me a description of the man who attacked you? I’m assuming it was a man, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Did you recognize him?”

Addie shook her head.

“So, he didn’t look familiar? How about hair color? Identifying marks? Tattoos? Scars? Anything?” Officer Torres sounded desperate.

Addie could only stare down at her bloodstained hands. How had this happened? She’d worked late tons of times and never had a problem. Why now? Why?

“Ma’am?”

“Big.”

“Big?”

“The buttons on his vest looked like they were about to pop.”

“So he was fat?”

“Muscular.” Addie picked at the blood under her nails.

“Don’t.” Officer Torres grabbed Addie’s hand and pulled it away. “You might have evidence under your fingernails. Don’t.”

Officer Torres’s voice brought her back to her harsh new reality. She’d been attacked, brutalized, and for what? She looked over at the elevator again. Her purse was missing. Was robbery the motive? It didn’t matter. She didn’t keep anything of value in it. Her briefcase was still there and closed. So why her? Why?

“I’m not sure I can be of much help. It all happened so fast, and I was...” God. Why hadn’t she been paying attention instead of texting?

“You were what?”

“I was texting, and a man got on the elevator. I guess I wasn’t really paying attention.” Addie’s eyes welled up with tears. She was her own worst enemy right now. It had all happened in a flash.

Officer Torres peppered her with questions again. “Can you tell me anything? Height? Weight? Hair color? Anything that can help us look for this guy?”

Addie wracked her brain. Squeezing her eyes shut she forced herself to remember what had happened after she texted Tara. The smell of her gran-gran’s house flashed in her mind.

“He smelled like an old person?”

“Huh?” Officer Torres stopped writing on her small pad. “Old person?”

“Yeah...he...mothballs.” She tried to cough, her throat constricting as the partial memory flashed. “The smell reminded me of my grandmother’s house.”

Paul knelt and tilted the water bottle so Addie could take a drink.

“Sir.” Torres lanced him with a commanding look. “Crime scene.” She pointed at the pool of blood he’d just knelt in.

“She needs some water,” he said.

Addie shrank under the weight of everyone staring at her, gagging at the taste of blood mixing with the water as she gingerly sipped from the bottle. She covered her mouth, trying to keep the liquid down, but backwashed into the bottle. Red swirls mixed with the pure water.

She pushed the bottle away and whispered, “Thanks.”

Paul stroked her head and then placed a soft kiss on her forehead before he stood and rejoined the cleaning women still gawking at her. She suddenly wished Drake could be more like Paul.

“Okay. Did he have dark hair?”

Addie nodded.

“Black or brown?”

“Brown.”

Torres scribbled on her pad. “How about height? Was he as tall as you?”

Addie shook her head.

“Taller?”

Addie nodded. “I think so.” She couldn’t help the sob that escaped, so she covered her mouth to muffle any more that might slip out.

“You’re doing fine, miss.” A gentle pat on the shoulder was her only comfort from the officer.

Addie nervously bit her lip and cringed in pain as blood oozed into her mouth. Another memory flashed.

“Blood,” she blurted out. “I hit his nose with my forehead. His blood splattered on my face.” She reached up to touch her battered face, but the officer grabbed her wrist, stopping her again. Addie flinched at the contact, her bruised wrist still gripped in Officer Torres’s hand.

“Sorry,” Torres said. “But don’t touch anything. Maybe we can get something from his blood.” The officer turned Addie’s wrist over and examined her hand. “Did you hit him or scratch him?”

“Scratched.”

“Okay, good. You’re a fighter.”

Addie closed her eyes. She could hear the pencil being pushed against the paper of the notepad. Someone said something about a *suit* leaving the elevator earlier. Just the mention of a possible suspect made Addie shake so violently, she could barely control her movements. Looking over, she caught the outline of three people as her vision started wavering. She recognized Paul’s familiar form but barely made out the two women in cleaning uniforms.

“I’m...cold.” Addie pulled Paul’s jacket tighter around herself.

“You’re pretty pale. You’re probably going into shock, ma’am.” Officer Torres spoke into her mic. “ETA on that ambulance. And did you find out who was here earlier?”

“Two minutes. Negative. I think it was Travers.”

“Roger.” Turning back to Addie, she repeated the message. “The ambulance is close, ma’am. Can you remember anything else? Anything?”

“Spit shine,” she blurted out. She’d spent four years in the army and recognized a spit shine when she saw it.

“What?”

“His shoes. They looked brand-new.”

“What color were his suit and his shoes?”

“Black.”

“Anything else?”

Addie shook her head, squeezed her eyes shut, and curled further into herself, wishing she could disappear. She just wanted to go home and hide behind the protection of her locked door. She wanted to take a hot shower, crawl under her covers, and forget about what had just happened.

Boots squeaked on the clean tile floor, and the noisy jiggling of wheels caught her attention. She tensed at all the commotion surrounding her.

“It’s okay. It’s just a few more officers and the ambulance arriving.” Officer Torres gently touched her arm, and she opened her eyes. “Don’t worry. You’ll remember more later. A detective will probably come to the hospital to take your statement.”

“Can’t I just go home? I want to go home.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t let you do that, miss. You’ve been assaulted, and I recommend you get checked out.”

The offered smile was weak at best. Addie almost felt bad for her but suspected the officer was trained to see people at their worst. She definitely fit the bill, especially if the reaction of the cleaning women was any indication of how bad she looked.

“You’ve been through a very traumatic event. You’ll remember, and when you do, write it down. Every little bit helps.”

The jiggling sound of wheels grew nearer, and Officer Torres stepped away.

Addie focused on a blood smear on the back wall of the elevator. Her blood. She couldn’t bring herself to make eye contact with the enthusiastic medic gauging her. Thankfully, he made quick work of taking her vitals, assessing her injuries, establishing an IV line, all without disturbing possible evidence on her body.

“Okay. Let’s get her loaded and to the hospital.”

“Paul.” Addie reached out toward him. Grabbing his hand, she pulled him closer. “Don’t leave me, please.”

“I’m right here, Addie.”

“Sir, we have to leave.”

“I want him to ride with me in the ambulance.”

“But ma’am—”

“Get me off this thing then.” She started pulling at the straps that anchored her on the gurney.

“Addie, it’s okay. I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere. Right?” Paul asked the EMTs.

“Yes, ma’am. He can ride with you to the hospital.”

“Thank you,” he whispered.

One nodded and pulled the gurney sideways, lining it up to pull through the doors.

Addie caught a brief snippet of the conversation between the cop and the cleaning women. It didn’t sound promising. Not that she could blame them if they opted not to say anything. They’d always been friendly with Addie when they came up late at night to clean. The conversations had always drifted to their large extended families that depended on this job.

“Thank you, ladies,” Paul said as he passed them.

“I’ll need to speak to you, too, sir,” Officer Torres said.

“I’ll be at the hospital.” Paul still held Addie’s hand.

“Fine.”

She couldn’t focus on anything going on around her. She lay on the gurney paralyzed with fear. *Why me? Why?* Like a record needle that was stuck, the question played again and again in her head. Then the smell of mothballs wafted past her again. The sound of a door shutting made her freeze.

“It’s him,” she whispered.



Greyson slid her SUV into the tight confines of the parking slip of Mercy General like a skilled valet and then sat frozen there behind the wheel. She’d raced across town, her only deterrent the dense fog that hugged everything. The red and blue lights of an ambulance bounced off the drifting moisture, making the building appear more like a disco lounge than a hospital. She couldn’t move. It had only been a year since her life had been tossed upside down, but this place had played a big part in the series of events that still haunted her.

While her professional life was a straight-up rocket ride, her personal life had been a series of tragic events, starting with the sudden death of her wife after the birth of their son, Ben.

“I’m sorry, Greyson. I’m...I just don’t know how to say this, but something’s happened—”

“Ben? What’s wrong with Ben?” Greyson’s heart raced. She started for the elevator, but Dr. Madrigal stopped her. She’d been gone only for a moment, grabbing some flowers for Cate. They were her favorite, white roses. How could anything have happened?

“It’s not Ben.” Dr. Madrigal pulled Greyson out of the traffic pattern and set her down.

“I need to get up to Cate’s room, Millicent.”

“Greyson...it’s Cate.”

“What about Cate...” Greyson looked at Millicent and knew it was bad. “What about Cate, Mill?”

“She passed, Greyson.”

And that was it. It had been a textbook C-section, and moving into recovery they had discovered Cate's blood pressure had risen dangerously high, but they'd given her a shot and waited. When she was out of danger, the nurses had moved Cate to her room and brought baby Benjamin in so she could see him. Greyson's heart had fluttered when she'd watched Cate and Ben together.

A picture-perfect moment she hadn't captured on her phone camera. She'd thought they would share a lifetime of picture-perfect moments, so she didn't want to ruin their first minutes together. What was one missed opportunity? Greyson would regret her decision for the rest of her life. A day later, Cate had died from an aneurism. A sharp pain, a moment of relief, and suddenly Cate was gone.

Barely having time to mourn Cate, Greyson had found out by accident that her father had stage-three liver cancer. Another gut punch. She had been to the hospital every day, sitting with him and watching him wither away before her eyes. Ben had given her father such joy at the end of his life that she was happy he'd held on long enough to see him.

Greyson smiled. Ben was the glue that kept *her* together.

Peering over the steering wheel, she looked at the stalwart structure that had not only been her second home, but also the source of her deepest misery. Could she force herself to go inside one more time? This time it wasn't her drama to shoulder, or was it? As she yanked the door handle, the cool, wet mist of fog sent a chill through her. She pulled her collar up, bracing for what was to come.

She cast a quick glance around the Mercy General parking lot as she slipped past the sole ambulance in the emergency bay off-loading its human cargo. Again she noticed the red and blue lights taking turns doing an erratic dance in the fog and relaxed when she didn't see any of the requisite reporters' vans with antennas scratching the sky. If they already had the story, they would have swarmed her, sticking microphones in her face, blinding her with camera lights. She'd seen video of herself. Most of the time she looked like a spider under a magnifying glass, the light burning a hole right through her. She wasn't under any illusions; they were coming. It was only a matter of time.

Pulling her phone she checked the time.

12:10.

Too early for a call to Neil Harris, especially when she didn't know what she was dealing with, yet.

Emergency personnel greeted her by name. Enough time hadn't elapsed for her to be just another face in the always crowded room. She inquired about Addie Blake and received the typical hospital response: *Our apologies, but we can only talk to family members. However, if you'd like to have a seat in the waiting area, I'll see what I can do.* That was the hospital's way of saying, Don't bother us.

Her heels clicked on the sterile floors on her way to the waiting room. The smell of hospital disinfectant burned her nose. She passed the same window that faced the parking garage. The same dying potted plants still offered little hope for a diversion. Too much nervous energy had her pacing

the floor in front of the window. Efficient use of space, she thought, glancing back at the plants. She wouldn't be able to stay in the claustrophobic area for much longer. In fact, she'd been there five minutes too long already. She made her way back to the ER desk. She wasn't above requesting a favor from the head of emergency medicine, Doctor Millicent Madrigal, if it hurried them along.

On a mission, Greyson marched down the hall but froze just as she rounded a corner of the emergency-room hallway. A woman's frantic voice carried down the hall. She thought she recognized one of the voices, and the other had bitch language floating off it like a trash can being emptied. Standing off to the side, she watched the scene unfold in front of her. A woman and man stood almost nose-to-nose, and from the looks of it they were ready to come to blows. She recognized Paul Winston. He worked for I.F., at least she thought he did. The woman, no clue, but she was a hulking creature, wearing a mechanic's shirt with *Drake* on the name patch.

"Look, I'm not built for this kinda thing." The woman ran her hands through her short black hair and then stuffed her fists into her pockets. "I mean, God, Paul. She's gonna be a wreck, and I gotta work. I can't sit home and hold her hand all day."

"She needs you, Drake. She was attacked and she's...well, she's in bad shape."

"Yeah, she was attacked at work, right? So the company's responsible. They gotta have deep pockets, right?"

"Where are you going with this, Drake?"

Greyson watched as the woman called Drake leaned against the sterile surface and nervously twitched her shoulders. "They have a duty to keep her safe, and they didn't do that, did they? So they need to answer for what happened to her."

"Jeez, Drake. She's in there hurting and all you're thinking about is revenge?"

"Look, this happened at work. I need to call and get her a good lawyer. Integrated Financial needs to pay for their lack of security. They need to pay for what happened to my girlfriend."

The ultra-clean floors squeaked as the woman heaved herself off the wall and paced back and forth. Greyson knew people like her. Event opportunists, she liked to call them. The kind of people who took advantage of a tragedy, a circumstance, or a problem and made a quick buck off it.

"Let it alone, Drake. You're only going to make matters worse. Think of Addie," Paul pleaded. "Besides, you should prepare yourself for how she looks."

"Looks? What do you mean?"

"Greyson?"

Greyson stiffened as a hand grabbed her shoulder. Drake and Paul went rigid and looked at her.

"Is that Addie's boss?" Greyson heard Drake yell.

Shit! Shit! Shit! She didn't want a blowout here in the waiting room.

"What are you doing here?" Greyson recognized the smooth tone of Dr. Madrigal's voice. She turned, ignoring the pair, and smiled at the tall African-American woman, hugging her.

"Millicent. How are you?"

"Good. Everything okay with your mom?"

Pulling Dr. Madrigal's elbow, she guided her down the hallway and out of the reach of prying ears.

"Yes, yes, Mom's fine. I ah...I was notified that an employee of mine was attacked and brought here. So I was just checking in on her condition." Greyson moved Millicent farther away from the conversation that was starting to roll out of control over her shoulder and back toward the nurses' station.

"Oh, that's awful." Millicent lowered her voice. "I've just been called to emergency on a possible rape."

"I think that's her. Her name's Addie Blake. Is it possible for you to check?" Greyson positioned herself between Dr. Madrigal and Drake.

"I need to get to the emergency room, but I'll let you know."

"That wouldn't be breaking any rules, would it?"

"I can't give out personal information, but I can see how she is."

"Thank you so much. I appreciate it." Greyson smiled.

"I can't promise anything, but I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks."

Greyson could feel eyes crawling all over her, so she casually turned to confront them. Her gaze instantly locked with Drake's. The hair on her neck stood, and she felt an instant aversion to the woman. Drake flashed her a cocky grin. If they'd been somewhere else, she might just knock it off her face. She shot Paul a glance, and he instantly looked away and grabbed Drake's arm as she started for Greyson.

"I'd listen to Paul if I were you." Greyson stepped into Drake's personal space. The action froze Paul where he stood.

"You ain't me, and I don't need someone telling me what to do. If I was you, I'd watch my back."

"Well, what you lack in brains, you make up for in moxie." She returned Drake's cocky smile, lifted her finger, and broke the ultimate taboo. Greyson touched her. Pushing Drake's chin up with just the tip of her index finger, Greyson made sure she recognized their difference in stature. She looked down at the human brick wall.

Drake cocked her arm back, but before she could shoot it out, Paul grabbed it, almost unable to keep Drake from striking Greyson.

"I wouldn't be threatening me, if I were you. I don't take threats lightly. I'm like that junkyard dog you have chained to the fence in front of your shop. He hates you like a bat hates daylight. And one of these days, he's gonna snap a chain and even the score."

Greyson flicked her wrist, jerked Drake's head to the side, and whispered, "Yeah, feel me?" She glanced at Paul, then strutted past Drake without so much as a sideways look. This was war, and nobody came into I.F. and screwed with the boss.

Nobody.

Pulling her phone from her Chanel bag, she tapped the screen and texted.

12:34—*Shit just went sideways. Pack accordingly.*

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About the Author

Isabella lives on the central coast with her wife, and three sons. She teaches college and in her spare time, which there seems to be little of lately, she is working on her writers retreat in the Sierra foothills. She is a GLCS award winner for Always Faithful and a finalist for Scarlet Masquerade. She was also a finalist in the International National Book awards and has two honorable mentions in the Rainbow Awards.

She also writes under the nom de plume - Jett Abbott. A darker, rogue who's a motorcycle enthusiast and loves people watching.

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Check out Isabella's other books

Award winning novel - Always Faithful - ISBN - 978-0-982860-80-9

Major Nichol "Nic" Caldwell is the only survivor of her helicopter crash in Iraq. She is left alone to wonder why she and she alone survived. Survivor's guilt has nothing on the young Major as she is forced to deal with the scars, both physical and mental, left from her ordeal overseas. Before the accident, she couldn't think of doing anything else in her life.

Claire Monroe is your average military wife, with a loving husband and a little girl. She is used to the time apart from her husband. In fact, it was one of the reasons she married him. Then, one day, her life is turned upside down when she gets a visit from the Marine Corps.

Can these two women come to terms with the past and finally find happiness, or will their shared sense of honor keep them apart?

Forever Faithful - ISBN - 978-1-939062-75-8

Life is what happens when you make other plans, and Nic and Claire have just found out that life and the Marine Corps have other plans for their lives. Nic Caldwell has served her country, met the woman of her dreams, and has reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. She's studying at one of the nation's most prestigious military universities, setting her sights on a research position after graduation. Things couldn't be better and then it happens; a sudden assignment to Afghanistan derails any thoughts of marriage and wedded bliss. Another combat zone, another tragedy, and Nic suddenly finds herself fighting for her life. Claire Monroe loves her new life in Monterey. She's finally where she wants to be, getting ready to start her master's program at the local university, watching her daughter, Grace, growing up, and getting ready to marry the love of her life. What could possibly derail a perfect life? The Marine Corps. Will Nic survive Afghanistan? Can Claire step up and be the strength in their relationship? Or will this overseas assignment and a catastrophic accident divide their once happy home?

American Yakuza - ISBN - 978-0-9828608-3-0

Luce Potter straddles three cultures as she strives to live with the ideals of family, honor, and duty. When her grandfather passes the family business to her, Luce finds out that power, responsibility and justice come with a price. Is it a price she's willing to die for?

Brooke Erickson lives the fast-paced life of an investigative journalist living on the edge until it all comes crashing down around her one night in Europe. Stateside, Brooke learns to deal with a new reality when she goes to work at a financial magazine and finds out things aren't always as they seem.

Can two women find enough common ground for love or will their two different worlds and cultures keep them apart?

American Yakuza II - The Lies that Bind - ISBN - 978-10939062-20-8

Luce Potter runs her life and her business with an iron fist and complete control until lies and deception unravel her world. The shadow of betrayal consumes Luce, threatening to destroy the most precious thing in her life, Brooke Erickson.

Brooke Erickson finds herself on the outside of Luce's life looking in. As events spiral out of control Brooke can only watch as the woman she loves pushes her further away. Suddenly, devastated and alone, Brooke refuses to let go without an explanation.

Colby Water, a federal agent investigating the ever-elusive Luce Potter, discovers someone from her past is front and center in her investigation of the Yakuza crime leader. Before she can put the crime boss in prison, she must confront the ultimate deception in her professional life.

When worlds collide, betrayal, dishonor and death are inevitable. Can Luce and Brooke survive the explosion?

America Yakuza III- Razor's Edge - ISBN - 978-1-943353-81-1

Luce Potter lives by a code of honor. Push her and she shoves back, harder. There's only one problem: Luce has just found out that revenge is a knife that cuts both ways. Now that her lover Brooke has survived the attack on her life, Luce has only one thing on her mind, and his name is Frank. Unfortunately, someone walks into her life that she didn't see coming. Brooke Erickson has survived an attack so brutal it's left a permanent scar on her soul. All she wants to do now is go home and finish recuperating with her lover, Luce Potter, by her side. An unexpected event puts Brooke at the head of the Yakuza family. Can she command the respect necessary to lead it through the crisis? Luce and Brooke's worlds are upending. Can each do what's necessary to survive and return to a new normal

Executive Disclosure- ISBN - 978-0-9828608-3-0

When a life is threatened, it takes a special breed of person to step in front of a bullet. Chad Morgan's job has put her life on the line more times that she can count. Getting close to the client is expected; getting too close could be deadly for Chad. Reagan Reynolds wants the top job at Reynolds Holdings and knows how to play the game like "the boys." She's not above using her beauty and body as currency to get what she wants. Shocked to find out someone wants her dead, Reagan isn't thrilled at the prospect of needing protection as she tries to convince the board she's the right woman for a man's job. How far will a killer go to get what they want? Secrets and deception twist the rules of the game as a killer closes in. How far will Chad go to protect her beautiful, but challenging client?

Surviving Reagan - ISBN - 978-1-939062-38-3

Chad Caldwell has finally worked through the betrayal of her former client and lover, Reagan Reynolds. Putting the pieces of her life back in order, she finds herself on a collision course with that past when she takes on a new client, the future first lady. Unfortunately, Chad's newest job puts her in the cross-hairs of a domestic terrorist determined to release a virus that could kill thousands of women. Reagan Reynolds has paid for her sins and is ready to start a new life. Attending a business conference in Abu Dhabi gives her the opportunity to prove to her father and herself that she's worthy of a fresh start. Her past will intersect with her future at the conference when she accidentally comes face-to-face with Chad Caldwell. Time is running out. Will Reagan confront Chad? Can she convince Chad she's changed, or will death part them forever?

Broken Shield - ISBN - 978-0-982860-82-3

Tyler Jackson, former paramedic now firefighter, has seen her share of death up close. The death of her wife caused Tyler to rethink her career choices, but the death of her mother two weeks later cemented her return to the ranks of firefighter. Her path of self-destruction and womanizing is just a front to hide the heartbreak and devastation she lives with every day. Tyler's given up on finding love and having the family she's always wanted. When tragedy strikes her life for a second time she finds something she thought she lost.

Ashley Henderson loves her job. Ignoring her mother's advice, she opts for a career in law enforcement. But, Ashley hides a secret that soon turns her life upside down. Shame, guilt and fear keep Ashley from venturing forward and finding the love she so desperately craves. Her life comes crashing down around her in one swift moment forcing her to come clean about her secrets and her life.

Can two women thrust together by one traumatic event survive and find love together, or will their past force them apart?

Scarlet Assassin - ISBN - 978-1-939062-36-9

Selene Hightower is a killer for hire. A vampire who walks in both the light and the darkness, but lately darkness has a stronger pull. Her unfinished business could cost her the ability to live in the light, throwing her permanently back into the black ink of evil.

Doctor Francesca Swartz led a boring life filled with test tubes, blood trials, and work. One exploratory night, in a world of leather and torture, she is intrigued by a dark and solitary soul. She surrenders to temptation and the desire to experience something new, only to discover that it might alter her life forever.

Will Selene allow the light to win over the darkness threatening the edges of her life? Two women wonder if they can co-exist despite vast differences, as worlds collide and threaten to destroy any hope of happiness. Who will win?

The Gate - ISBN - 978-1-943353-93-4

Valhalla is for warriors that die in battle. What of those who don't have a hero's death? Where do they go? The inter-world is in chaos and has become the heart of the battleground in the war between Paladins and Gatekeepers. Harley doesn't know it yet, but she's at ground zero. A night of drinking, to forget a cheating girlfriend, is about to change her life forever. A birthmark—or a birthright—sets her on a direct path to a woman who claims to have known her for centuries. Not ready to accept her Paladin mantle, she needs proof—and that proof is out to destroy her. A protector by birth, Dawn was bred to preserve the delicate cycle of life and death. Protecting a Paladin is to be mated for eternity, usually without the sex, but Harley's allure is universally compelling. Harley's rise in status to The Chosen complicates things further as Dawn finds herself fighting for her own heart, as well as battling her biggest nemesis and brother, Lucius. Lucius, lord of the Gatekeepers, is out to kill souls moving to their next life. He wants Harley in his corner and he isn't about to let a little sibling rivalry stand in the way, no matter what it takes. Harley find herself caught up in Lucius's tempting promise of power, but cannot shake the soul-tugging love she feels with Dawn. Will Dawn convince Harley in time to embrace her Paladin destiny and save the souls looking for their gate, or will Lucius be able to sway Harley to throw in with the Gatekeepers?

Writing as Jett Abbott

GCLS Finalist - Scarlet Masquerade - ISBN - 978-0-982860-81-6

What do you say to the woman you thought died over a century ago? Will time heal all wounds or does it just allow them to fester and grow? A.J. Locke has lived over two centuries and works like a demon, both figuratively and literally. As the owner of a successful pharmaceutical company that specializes in blood research, she has changed the way she can live her life. Wanting for nothing, she has smartly compartmentalized her life so that when she needs to, she can pick up and start all over again, which happens every twenty years or so. Love is not an emotion A.J. spends much time on. Since losing the love of her life to the plague one hundred fifty years ago, she vowed to never travel down that road again. That isn't to say she doesn't have women when she wants them, she just wants them on her terms and that doesn't involve a long term commitment.

A.J.'s cool veneer is peeled back when she sees the love of her life in a lesbian bar, in the same town, in the same day and time in which she lives. Is her mind playing tricks on her? If not, how did Clarissa survive the plague when she had made A.J. promise never to change her?

Clarissa Graham is a university professor who has lived an obscure life teaching English literature. She has made it a point to stay off the radar and never become involved with anything that resembles her past life. Every once in a while Clarissa has an itch that needs to be scratched, so she finds an out of the way location to scratch it. She keeps her personal life separate from her professional one, and in doing so she is able to keep her secrets to herself. Suddenly, her life is turned upside down when someone tries to kill her. She finds herself in the middle of an assassination plot with no idea who wants her dead.