

PAIGE CARTER

Deputy Sheriff

Fatal Fashion *Season 7, Episode 6*

by:

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Dax woke and realized he was alone. *Where was Paige?* He climbed from the bed, slid into his jeans, and pulled the sweatshirt he tossed onto the floor over his head as he exited the bedroom. The house was completely dark. He frowned and started to get worried. He was pretty sure she wouldn't leave without telling him.

He stepped into the kitchen, glanced around, and started to pivot when he realized the back door was unlocked. Relieved, he stepped into the darkness and spotted her huddled under her favorite blanket on the nearest lounge chair, sipping a mug of hot chocolate. "Hey, pretty lady. What are you doing out here?"

"Couldn't sleep," she watched him approach the chair.

"Sit forward." When she did, he settled behind her, pulled her against him, and wrapped his arms around her, resting his hands on her stomach. "So, why are you out here in the cold instead of curled up with your amazing husband in a warm bed?"

"I feel like a beached whale, and I couldn't sleep. Then our little watermelon started moving around and once I was awake, my mind wouldn't settle," Paige admitted. "I didn't want to wake you, so I came out here to enjoy the peace and quiet for a while."

"In another month, that won't be possible. It'll be too cold to relax out here in the dark," Dax observed. They sat in silence for several minutes. "You seem — off. What's going on?"

"I just have a lot on my mind," Paige evaded.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. Everything is changing, and I don't know how to deal with it," Paige admitted.

"But are they good changes or bad changes?" Dax wondered.

"Both, maybe. I don't know, it's a lot to deal with. We're moving, we're having a baby, and my job is confusing," Paige began. "Then there are the changes with Nathan and Sophie. They bought a house and moved to Utah. I can't believe they're actually here. If you told me Nathan would ever leave Washington, I'd say you were crazy."

"They're having a grandbaby." Dax kissed the top of her head. "I'm not surprised they moved."

"Hawk, the terminal bachelor, is now dating your secretary," Paige continued. "And he can't get us into our new home fast enough."

"He wants a little privacy," Dax shrugged. "All of those things are good things."

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“Jericho is getting serious with Harper,” Paige continued. “He finally met her son, and they hit it off better than any of us expected.”

“Why does that upset you?” Dax could hear it in her voice.

“I’m not upset — exactly,” Paige considered. “I just worry our relationship is going to change. What if the kid doesn’t like me? What if I lose Jericho because of him?”

“What if you gain a brother?” Dax countered.

“That’s impossible,” Paige frowned. “We’re not related.”

“Of course you are,” Dax disagreed. “Jericho would have been your stepfather if things were different. Since you came back to Manti, he’s stepped into that role. He loved your mom, and it appears the feeling was mutual. They didn’t need a certificate to make that official — or to make it last. They loved each other, and Jericho is your father. Now, Jericho is dating that kid’s mother — which makes him a potential brother.”

“You’re a weirdo,” Paige shook her head.

“But I’m a brilliant, extremely logical weirdo,” Dax grinned. “And I’m right.”

“Whatever, my job has also changed,” Paige continued. “It’s strange sitting at a desk all day, not handling calls.”

“Is that why you’re upset?” Dax wondered. “You miss the job?”

“That’s the strange part,” Paige sighed. “I kind of like what I’m doing. If we had a detective allocation, I’d fight for it. I think this is what I was born to do. It’s challenging.”

“Again, isn’t that a good thing?” Dax wondered.

“I guess,” Paige whispered. “Once the baby is born, everything will change again. And I’m going to miss what I’m doing now. I’m helping a lot of people get answers and I like it.”

“Maybe Jericho will let you continue — as time allows,” Dax offered.

“I don’t see how,” Paige disagreed. “Plus, there’s this case — it’s not about change, but I have this case Gage gave me I can’t figure out. Normally, there’s evidence, forensic elements that direct the investigation. Not this time. There aren’t any leads, and the victim’s sister still believes Big Foot killed her brother.”

“Well, if you’re dealing with the elusive Sasquatch,” Dax grinned. “That’s why you don’t have any leads. I mean, Big Foot probably wouldn’t leave a cigar with his DNA or drop his wallet on his way out of the area. And I’m pretty sure he doesn’t drive; so, no tire tracks. Have you checked everything for drool?”

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“Not funny.” Paige held back her smile. “And it’s supposed to be Big Foot, not a giant bulldog.”

“You can’t solve them all, Paige. Just do your best and that will have to be enough,” Dax suggested.

“It doesn’t matter.” Paige decided. “I can only do what I can do. Anyway, our life is going to change the most. I’m worried about those changes. We can’t discuss murder and violence with a child in the room. We can’t debate the details of a case over breakfast anymore, and that’s kind of our thing.”

“We’ll find a way to talk about the details,” Dax assured her. “It might not be over breakfast, but that is our thing, and we’ll keep doing it.”

“How?” Paige wondered. “I’ll have to keep the file at work. The last thing I want my child to see are images of death and violence. Think about the Jane Doe case. You had those pictures spread out all over the living room. That will have to stop.”

“Paige, you’re not the first cop to have a baby.” Dax wondered where all of this was coming from. “Other police officers have figured it out, so will we.”

“I guess.” Paige shifted and cuddled into him, not entirely sure he was right.

Dax pressed a gentle kiss to her temple and the two of them silently watched the sun rise over the mountain.

Hours later, Dax sat at his desk at the training center, still thinking about the conversation he had with Paige. Now he was worried. She had a point. The things they did as a matter of routine would have to change. They couldn’t openly discuss death, violence, and victims in their home with a kid running around. Somehow, they’d find a way to continue that part of their life — they had to, because it was their thing, and it was an important part of their relationship. A part he wasn’t willing to lose.

“What’s eating you?” Hawk dropped into a chair across from Dax. “What’s going on?”

“Changes.” He sat back, studied his friend for several minutes, then relayed the conversation he and Paige had that morning.

Hawk listened and considered. “I’m sorry if I’ve been putting pressure on you guys. I didn’t think. You have a lot going on in your life, and my housing problems are insignificant.”

“I understand you need some space,” Dax sighed. “This isn’t about you. It’s about Paige, about the changes that are going to occur in our lives and how the things that are fundamental to our relationship are going to have to end.”

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“Or not,” Hawk disagreed. “Have you ever considered bringing Paige in — to all of this?” Hawk waved his hand around. “She’d be an amazing instructor, and she has knowledge and experience that very few people have. If she enjoys working cold cases, she could do that here, with a class full of cops. The routine might change, but the two of you could discuss cases here, at the office. You wouldn’t need to take files home and the kid would be protected.”

“Paige is a cop,” Dax disagreed. “I won’t pressure her to quit. It’s my job to support her, not force her into more changes.”

“Just think about it,” Hawk suggested. “It could be a good fit. She’s already part of the family. Even that miscreant, Vato, has come around.”

“Let’s talk about the training session.” Dax wasn’t willing to put that kind of pressure on Paige, no matter how much he liked the idea.

Paige settled into her chair, worn out and exhausted. She wondered how much longer she’d be able to do this. Carrying a human around was draining all of her energy, especially when she only got a few hours’ sleep. She glanced up when the door flew open, and Gage stepped in.

“Hey, Clayton,” she called and motioned him to join her.

“What’s up?” Gage dropped into her visitor’s chair. “You look terrible. Maybe you should take the day off.”

“Such a charmer,” Paige waved away his concern. “I wanted to talk to you about that case you asked me to look into. That one up in Spanish Fork.”

“Right,” Gage straightened. “Did you find something?”

“I’m not sure we can help him,” Paige admitted and pulled out the images. “I’d bet my next paycheck the man was killed by a human, not an animal. Unfortunately, proving that using forensic evidence will be impossible. There’s not any.”

“What makes you think the attack was by a human?” Gage took the photo she handed him.

“See that straight line?” Paige asked. “On the left side of his neck.”

Gage brought the image closer to his nose. “I—” he looked up. “I’m not sure.”

Paige handed him a magnifying glass. “Look close.”

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Gage studied the picture again and, using the magnifying glass, he immediately saw what she was talking about. “Isn’t it possible that a mountain lion made that injury? They have sharp claws, and a quick swipe could be straight and deep like that.”

“Not that straight,” Paige disagreed. “There’s a difference between a claw mark and the slice of a knife. That looks like someone cut his throat with a large knife of some kind and left him in the wilderness. At that point, a bobcat or mountain lion took advantage of the fresh kill and helped themselves to dinner. It also could have been a coyote. I believe someone murdered that man, but I can’t prove it — not with the evidence they have. I’ll keep it at the back of my mind and try to think of another direction they can go at it; but unfortunately, I’m stumped. Maybe they should start tearing his life apart and see if they can come up with a suspect that wanted him dead.”

“That sucks,” Gage sat back. “He was depending on you to help him with this. Can I assure him Big Foot is out?”

“Yeah,” Paige rolled her eyes. “I can say with one hundred percent certainty Big Foot did not kill that man. I think it was a homicide. Your friend should talk to the brother, the one that says it was murder. See who he thinks did it and approach it from that angle.” She handed the file back to Gage. “I’m not giving up; but, at the moment, I’m bewildered and there’s nothing more I can do with that.”

“Paige,” Jericho stopped in his doorway. “In my office.”

“Duty calls.” Paige pushed to her feet and headed across the room. She paused when Margie held out a stack of messages. “Are those all for the boss?”

“Most of them are outside agencies with cold cases they want you to look into,” Margie shrugged.

Paige just stared at her, completely speechless. There had to be a couple dozen messages in that pile.

“Paige,” Jericho called from his office.

“Margie wanted me to give you these.” Paige dropped the messages on his desk before settling into a chair.

Jericho grabbed the messages, stood and headed for the door. “Margie, I need you to call these people back and tell them if they want Paige to help them, they’ll need to submit a detailed report for my review. Once I look that over, I’ll decide which cases we’ll take, and which are not worth her time.”

“I can do that,” Paige offered. “If I see something I think is workable, I’ll bring it to you.”

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“Once we get the files, we’ll decide how to sort through and choose,” Jericho decided. “For now, I have a case I want you to look into.”

“Where’s it from?” Paige sat back, wondering how Jericho decided on that particular case.

“Colorado,” Jericho tossed a folder across the desk. “I have two others. If you figure out the Colorado situation, I have one from…” He started rifling through folders. “Right, here it is.” He started to pass it to her, but knocked another folder onto the floor.

Paige leaned down to gather up the scattered documents. An image of a man that looked devastated fell out. Something about the man intrigued her. She held it out as she straightened. “What about this one?”

“Naw.” Jericho held out his hand, expecting her to hand the file back. “I’m denying that one. Vegas pretty much has it figured out. The detective is confident that man — he’s the partner — they think he did it. They just wanted you to scan the evidence and make sure they didn’t miss anything. They can tie things up without your help.”

“If that’s all they want,” Paige grabbed the rest of the file and set it on the chair next to her. “I’d be happy to look.”

Jericho narrowed his eyes. “Why?”

“Because I disagree,” Paige shrugged. “Now, tell me about Colorado.”

“The chief out there is worried they might have a serial killer in the area,” Jericho sighed. “I say two murders don’t rise to serial, but he’s insisting there could be another death any day if we can’t help them solve it. The citizens in the area are terrified and, with the holidays coming, they want it closed as soon as possible. I’ve looked over the file and I’m not so sure this is as random as they believe it is. I also think, if I’m right and it wasn’t a random maniac taking out strangers, there will not be additional deaths. I just need you to look, see what you think, and decide if there’s anything we can do to help.”

Paige accepted the folder. “Can I also look into Vegas?” She tapped the file on the chair next to her.

“Focus on Colorado,” Jericho ordered. “If you have time, then you can dig into Vegas. Colorado is the priority, no games on this one. I want your word on that.”

“No games,” Paige agreed. “I’ll take both files and look through them. What are all of those?” She pointed to the stack of folders on the edge of his desk — the place the file from Vegas fell from.

“Requests for you,” Jericho sighed. “I’m not going through all of those. Margie will inform anyone making a request that they need to submit a summary of the facts. If it sounds like we can

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help, she'll ask for a copy of the file, and you can skim through and see if you believe you can assist them. If not, we'll let them know there's nothing we can do. Seriously, this is getting out of hand."

"Why are they requesting my help?" Paige stared at the enormous pile and frowned.

"It started with that Julianna case," Jericho shrugged. "Well, it may have started before that. You've assisted Salt Lake City and Vegas before. Cops talk — they're worse than a bunch of old ladies having tea. Anyway, you had that baby case that brought in multiple agencies and that other guy — that leap year killer. Your name is out there. Then add in your husband's class — and that case that connected to Bundy and we have this," he motioned to the pile of folders on his desk.

"I don't even know what to say," Paige considered. It wasn't possible for her to look at all of those cases before she had her baby — especially when Margie just took messages from at least a dozen additional departments requesting help.

"There's nothing to say," Jericho told her. "It's my problem. I'll deal with this mess; you focus on the case I assigned from Colorado and let me know when you're finished."

Paige was sitting at her desk, reading through the case Jericho assigned from Colorado, when her phone rang. She reached over and absently answered but continued to read. "Deputy Carter."

"Hey, baby," Dax answered. "You busy?"

"A little," she set the file aside. "I have two new cases to look into. What's up?"

"I just missed you and wanted to see how your day was going," Dax told her.

"You've been worried about me after our conversation this morning," Paige realized. "I'm fine, so stop worrying."

"Never," Dax disagreed. "I was thinking of grabbing dinner. Will you be home on time?"

"Yeah," Paige glanced at the clock. "I'll make sure I leave on time."

"Bring the new cases," Dax added. "We'll go through them tonight."

"Are you rebelling?" Paige laughed.

"Absolutely," Dax laughed. "I love you, babe. See you tonight."

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Paige hung up and stared out the window. She should have known the conversation they had this morning would stick with Dax. He was already stressed out and worried since they discovered she was pregnant. And building a house in the middle of it was just making things so much worse. Maybe taking the files home would help settle things and get them back to normal. She grabbed the Colorado file and continued skimming through the details. Basically, someone killed two female realtors in homes that were for sale. They worked for different companies, but both were very successful. Someone killed them about a week apart using the same method. She was still reading when Jericho closed his door and told her to go home.

Paige glanced at the clock, frantically gathered up the files, and shoved them into her bag. When she stepped outside, she realized Jericho was waiting for her.

“Any insights?” he asked on the way to her car.

“Not yet,” Paige admitted. “So far, I’m with you, though. I’m not sure it’s a serial killer. Two successful realtors getting killed before they can show a house doesn’t mean there’s a dangerous sociopath on the loose. It might just be a homicidal maniac that hates realtors. Or it could be someone that had a personal grudge against those two women. They’re jumping to conclusions, and I have found no facts that support their theory.”

“Keep at it and let me know what you decide,” Jericho pulled her door open. “And don’t spend too much time on those tonight. You look tired, you need to get more rest. The next couple of months are going to be difficult.”

“Well,” Paige settled into her car. “Based on that stack of files on your desk, I don’t have time to rest.”

“Don’t focus on the requests,” Jericho insisted. “We won’t accept all of them. In fact, we’re only going to accept the ones we want to accept. There’s no pressure, not from me. So, don’t put that kind of pressure on yourself.”

“I get the feeling the cases I would choose are far different from the cases you’re going to choose. I’d like to handle both — yours and mine. If I work hard and deal with the files you assign, I’m hoping you’ll give me the opportunity to help with the cases I want to focus on.”

“We’ll look at the summaries and decide together,” Jericho assured her. “Drive safe and tell that husband of yours to take care of you tonight.”

Paige and Dax were relaxing on the couch. Dax was messaging her left foot as she skimmed through the files, not sure where to begin.

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“This file is missing information,” Paige complained and tossed it onto the table. “I can’t help them without the victim’s financials, the schedules, and any clients they have in common. I need to know who had access to the houses they were discovered in. This feels sloppy.”

“What about the other file?” Dax wondered.

“That’s one I chose,” Paige admitted.

“Tell me about it,” Dax pushed.

“That belongs to Vegas,” Paige told him.

“Will I get to see the pirate again?” Dax grinned. “It’s been what — a whole month?”

“Three months,” Paige corrected.

“And a couple months before that,” Dax added. “So, I think we’re due.”

“That’s not why I picked this case,” Paige objected. “And I see no reason the FBI would be involved. So, no. I don’t think we’ll be seeing Special Agent Sparrow.”

“That’s too bad. I was hoping he’d bring the rum,” Dax switched feet.

“Stop it,” Paige tried not to laugh.

“Tell me about the Vegas case,” Dax prompted.

“I haven’t really had time to dig into that one much,” Paige admitted. “It was just that picture — I guess you could say it spoke to me and I wanted to investigate it.”

“Why?” Dax wondered.

“The case agent thinks the partner did it. This is the partner. It was taken the night the man was killed.” Paige handed him the photo. “He’s devastated and, I don’t know, he just doesn’t look guilty to me.”

“Start at the beginning,” Dax requested. “You said partner, is that a business partner?”

“Right,” Paige straightened. “These two guys are fashion designers. They started their own company, were relatively successful, and they were in the middle of an elite, invitation only, fashion show when the partner was poisoned. Someone put cyanide in his hand lotion.”

“Horrible way to die, but definitely unique. And the detective thinks the partner did it.” Dax nodded. “But you don’t.”

“Look at his eyes,” Paige insisted. “That’s not the look of a depraved killer, that’s sorrow and grief. The only reason they think the partner did it was because they were arguing before the

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show began. One partner wanted to invest in a new project and the dead guy was resisting because he thought it was too expensive and risky. Okay, money is always a motivator, but that just doesn't feel like enough to me. Money wasn't tight, even with a new project."

"You studied the finances?" Dax wondered.

"Some, I need to spend more time reading the details," Paige told him.

"Sounds like you still have a lot of catching up to do," Dax told her.

"Yeah, I need to read through it carefully." Paige dropped the file on the table. "First, I need to organize it. When the file fell on the ground, it got all mixed up."

"Can you start tomorrow? It's getting late, and we were both up early. I'm ready to turn in." Dax stood and held out a hand.

"Alright," Paige decided. "I need to head in early so I can talk to Jericho. I have to put the Colorado thing on hold until they get more information. If he allows it, I'm going to focus on the Vegas case and see if there's anything that I can tug. Let's turn in. Maybe the little monster growing inside of me will settle tonight and let me get at least a few hours' sleep."

Paige was sitting at her desk, reading through an interview with one of the models when Jericho returned from a long meeting. "Paige?"

She stood and headed into the office.

"I talked to the Chief out in Colorado. He's instructed his detectives to get a warrant for the financials and he's working on the other stuff you said you needed. I calmed him down; he's keeping an open mind — at least for now. Any progress on that case from Vegas or do you want to look through the rest of these and see if there's something you want to tackle?"

"I'm working on the fashion designer case out of Vegas," Paige admitted. "I'm even more convinced they got that one wrong. I really don't think the partner was involved."

"Based on what?" Jericho wondered.

"It doesn't make sense," Paige insisted. "They decided the partner did it and they really didn't look further. Oh, they interviewed all the models and the rest of the staff, but they didn't push — on anything. I won't say it was sloppy. They went through the motions, crossed their T's and dotted their I's but then they filed it away and focused on Zane Morris. I need a little time to get through everything."

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“Then I’ll let you get to it,” Jericho said in dismissal.

Paige settled back in her chair and opened the file. She read through all the reports and started on the statements. She was skimming through the second interview when something caught her eye. She read through the statement again, then sat back and considered. After a few minutes, she picked up the phone and called Vegas.

“Detective Wilson.”

“Hey, it’s Deputy Paige Carter from Sanpete County. I’m calling regarding the Miko Sciarra homicide.”

“Right,” Wilson grabbed the file. “We just wanted you to take a look, see if there’s anything we missed that will help close this out. We haven’t been able to connect Morris to cyanide yet.”

“I doubt you will,” Paige told him. “Anyway, I’m calling to see if you can bring one of the models in for another interview.”

“Why?” Wilson wondered. “And what do you mean, you doubt I will?”

“I think you focused on the wrong suspect,” Paige told him. “And I think the model, Scarlett Jones, and Kade Morris, are involved. She might have additional information. I was hoping you could call her in and see what you can get from her.”

“Do you have the ability to conduct a video interview?” Wilson asked. “Since you’re the one with questions, I’d like you to be there.”

“Set it up on your end and I’ll make it work on mine,” Paige agreed. “I’ll need at least twenty minutes so I can get Margie to help.”

“I’ll aim for this afternoon,” Wilson told her. “But I’ll let you know after I talk to the model.”

“Keep me posted,” Paige said before she disconnected.

Three hours later, Paige was sitting in the conference room waiting for the interview to begin. Suddenly, the screen popped on and an attractive woman wearing a sleek maroon silk shirt and designer slacks was sitting next to an attractive, but clearly overworked, detective in a dark suit.

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“Looks like technology is our friend today,” Detective Wilson said the instant he saw Paige’s image appear on the screen. “Scarlett, this is Deputy Paige Carter from Manti, Utah. She’s going to be assisting in the interview this afternoon.”

“I still don’t understand why.” Scarlett studied the screen. “You said this was about Mika. What does that have to do with a cop in Utah?”

“Paige has an area of expertise that we believe might help us find answers,” Wilson evaded. “She’s assisted with tough cases in the past. We brought her in because the investigation isn’t progressing the way we hoped it might.”

“That’s because you’re focused on Kade instead of finding the person who actually killed Miko,” Scarlett challenged.

“I understand your position on this,” Wilson tried to soothe. “You’ve been very clear since the beginning.”

“Have you dealt with all the technicalities?” Paige wondered.

“Yes,” Wilson assured her. “Speak freely. You can start questioning Ms. Jones whenever you’re ready.”

“Alright.” Paige studied the woman. “Well, I guess my first question is why you’re so sure Kade had nothing to do with Miko’s death.”

“Kade loved Miko,” Scarlett said immediately. “They were more than best friends; they were like brothers. Kade would do anything for Miko. He certainly wouldn’t kill him.”

“How long have you been in love with him?” Paige wondered.

“I—” Scarlett hesitated while she studied Paige.

“Are the two of you dating?” Wilson pushed.

“Not anymore,” Scarlett admitted. “Miko’s death was too much. Kade broke things off a few days later.”

“Why?” Paige asked.

Scarlett hesitated, then sighed. “The night Miko was killed, he and Kade had an argument. Kade tried to tell Miko about us, but he blew up about it. Miko insisted Kade had to break things off. He said it wasn’t appropriate. Kade threw that back in his face and that’s when Miko brought up the shoe deal. He refused to even discuss it, just vetoed it out of spite, and the last words they spoke were angry. He’s having a hard time living with that and his answer was to follow through with Miko’s wishes. He won’t budge, so I’m out.”

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Paige considered; she felt a little sorry for this woman. “If he loved you the way you love him, things could still work out. Guilt is a powerful motivator, but with time, he might change his mind and realize he deserves to be happy.”

“I doubt it,” Scarlett brushed at her face and Paige realized she was trying not to cry.

“What do you mean Kade threw it back in his face?” Wilson studied the model, wondering if he’d missed a very important piece of this puzzle.

“I—” Scarlett’s gaze danced around the room, looking everywhere but at him.

“Was Miko cheating on his wife with one of the models?” Wilson pushed.

Scarlett studied him, emotions evident in her eyes. “I guess it doesn’t matter now.”

“Which means yes,” Paige realized. “Do you know he was seeing?”

“I promised Kade I wouldn’t say anything,” Scarlett began.

“That was before,” Paige insisted. “It’s important that you’re honest with us, Scarlett. If you want to help Kade, you have to tell us what you know.”

Scarlett dropped her gazes to her lap and stared at her hands for several seconds. “Alright. I saw Miko in the back. He didn’t know I was there; the show had started, and I was supposed to be standing in the wings, ready to go out on stage. I forgot something and rushed back to my dressing area. He was basically making out with Nina Wimmer. I mean, they were really going at it. Nina wasn’t part of the first set, and I have no doubt they were working up to — you know. They thought it was safe because nobody was supposed to be back there.”

“And what did you do?” Wilson asked.

“Nothing,” Scarlett shrugged. “I mean, I rushed back and did the show. Then, that night at Kade’s place, I told him what I saw. At first, he tried to act surprised, but I could tell he already knew. He brushed it off and said we don’t know how far it went and he asked me not to say anything. He didn’t want to upset Venus.”

“He didn’t think Miko’s wife knew about the affair?” Wilson realized.

“No,” Scarlett answered immediately. “Kade was sure Venus didn’t know anything about it and he didn’t want to cause problems in their marriage. He convinced me we should keep it a secret, so I did.”

“But then Miko tried to interfere in Kade’s relationship with you and Kade made sure Miko knew it wasn’t a secret,” Paige realized.

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“Basically,” Scarlett agreed. “And that made him angry, so he threw the shoe deal in Kade’s face. He refused to discuss it and shut it down. It got a little ugly, but I don’t think it was really about the shoes. Kade likes Venus, not romantically, but he likes her, he cares about her and he hated what Miko was doing to her. Miko didn’t like being called out that way. People heard an argument about shoes but it was more personal than that. It’s the only reason they did it at that show, out in public. They were both emotional and said things they didn’t mean. They would have worked it out, but Miko died and they didn’t get the chance.”

“Are you sure Venus doesn’t know her husband was cheating?” Paige asked.

“Yeah,” Scarlett nodded. “I mean, as sure as I can be. I really don’t think she knows.”

“If she did,” Wilson jumped in. “What would she do?”

“Well, I don’t think she’d poison Miko’s lotion,” Scarlett frowned. “That is what you’re getting at, right?”

“Basically,” Wilson agreed.

“No,” Scarlett shook her head. “She loved Miko, he treated her like a princess, gave her anything she wanted, and she was pampered. I always got the impression she was kind of weak and fragile. If she knew, it would devastate her. She’d probably break and then she’d forgive him and believe he wouldn’t do it again — if that’s what he told her. She wouldn’t kill the man that gave her everything.”

“But now she has everything, and she doesn’t need the man,” Paige challenged.

“Venus needs a man,” Scarlett disagreed. “I know you have to look into it and I should be happy your focus is on someone other than Kade, but I just don’t think she knew. Plus, I know Venus, there’s no way she did this.”

“What about the mistress? You said her name is Nina? Could she poison Miko’s lotion if he wasn’t willing to leave his wife?” Paige wondered.

“Maybe,” Scarlett said slowly. “I don’t like to point a finger at her because I don’t know, but she has a temper, and she can be vindictive. I hope she didn’t do it, but I honestly couldn’t say one way or the other.”

“Scarlett,” Wilson waited for her to glance up. “Is there anything else you know that might help us? Now is the time to be honest, no more secrets.”

“No, just that Kade wasn’t involved in this,” Scarlett said again. “I don’t know who did it, but it wasn’t Kade.”

“Alright,” Wilson glanced up. “Deputy Carter, you have anything else?”

Fatal Fashion

“Nope,” Paige decided. “I think that’s it.”

“You’re free to go,” Wilson told Scarlett.

Once she was gone, Wilson turned to Paige. “I hate to admit it, but you’re right.”

“Did that hurt?” Paige wondered.

Wilson laughed. “I know better, but I walked in, came to a conclusion and tried to make the evidence match my theory. That’s not the way to run an investigation.”

“Then why did you do it?” Paige wondered.

“I’d like to blame my sergeant,” Wilson considered. “He arrived, looked around, declared it was obvious what happened, and told me to close it out. Still, I know better.”

“Well, it’s not too late to fix it,” Paige suggested.

“And the first step I plan to take is to bring Nina the mistress in for an official interview,” Wilson told her. “You want in?”

“Naw,” Paige decided. “You can fill me in later.”

The following morning Paige stepped into the office and spotted a man waiting in her visitor’s chair. “Can I help you?” Paige asked him once she settled into her chair.

“Are you Deputy Paige Carter?”

“I am,” Paige nodded. “And you are?”

“Kade Morris,” he stood and held out a hand.

“I see,” Paige sat back.

“Scarlett said you spoke with her, and she thinks you can help me,” Kade admitted. “She also believes I can trust you. I don’t know about that; I do know I do not trust the detectives out of Vegas. Scarlett convinced me to try, so here I am.”

“What is it you want from me, Mr. Morris?” Paige considered, she should probably call Wilson and let him know before she took this any further.

“I don’t know,” he admitted. “I —” he looked away and seemed to gather his thoughts. “I didn’t hurt Miko,” he bit back his emotion. “I’m a little lost without him and I want the person who did this to pay for what they did. I want someone to pay for taking my friend away from me.”

Fatal Fashion

I don't know if talking to you will help, but if there's a chance that it will — I guess I have to take that chance.”

“This isn't my case,” Paige advised. “I'm simply assisting Las Vegas and I can't do anything until I speak with Detective Wilson.”

“I see,” Kade considered. “Maybe this was a mistake.”

“I don't think it was,” Paige disagreed. “I think you should trust Scarlett if you can't trust me. I think you should sit down with me and tell me everything you know about Miko, what was going on in his life when he died, and anyone that had access to his lotion. I think you should help us find the person who did this.”

“How can I do that if you speak with the detective that is trying to arrest me for a crime I didn't commit?” Kade demanded.

“I think he's had a change of heart,” Paige admitted. “And I don't believe you killed your friend. If you can't trust him, trust that I will help find the truth.”

“What do you need?” Kade asked hesitantly.

“First, let me call Detective Wilson,” Paige suggested. “I'll tell him you are here and you're willing to speak with me. He may want to participate. If so, we'll set up a video conference, sit down and hear what you have to say.”

“And if he insists you arrest me?” Kade wondered.

“He won't,” Paige said without hesitation. “First, because there's no reason to. Also, because this is Utah and the crime you are suspected of happened in Nevada. And finally, if they had enough to arrest you for that crime, you would be in jail, not sitting in front of my desk this morning.”

“I'm willing to try,” Kade decided. “But if this doesn't work, I'm going to stop the meeting and go home.”

“Alright,” Paige agreed. “Give me a few minutes to contact Wilson. Why don't you grab a cup of coffee and head into the conference room. I'll only be a minute.”

Kade studied her for several seconds. Paige figured he must have found what he was looking for because he slowly stood, stopped at the coffee bar to mix a fresh cup, then disappeared into the conference room. She picked up the phone and called Wilson.

Paige positioned herself across from Kade Morris after setting up the video. “I need to advise you of your rights.” Paige advised. She proceeded to read the Miranda Warning. “Are you willing to talk to us today?”

Fatal Fashion

“Yeah,” Kade frowned, not happy that he was still being treated like a suspect.

“We’re just here to find the truth,” Paige assured him. “To get any information you can give us that will lead us in the direction we should be going.”

“It sounds like you’re trying to blame me for something I didn’t do,” Kade challenged.

“I explained your rights for your protection as much as ours,” Paige explained. “Tell us about Miko. What was going on in his life when he died?”

“I want you to know that Miko loved Venus,” Kade began. “She is beautiful and naïve and fragile. Losing her husband broke more than you can imagine, and she might never recover.”

“Scarlett told us there may have been some infidelity,” Wilson advised.

“Miko was larger than life,” Kade continued. “He’s flamboyant, and he needed constant stimulation to motivate his creativity.”

“So, he cheated,” Paige said without emotion.

“Yes, he cheated,” Kade agreed, but looked away. “But he loved Venus. I know that’s difficult to understand, but he loved her, he adored her, and he cherished her — in his way. And she didn’t know. Miko made sure she didn’t know because he never wanted to hurt her.”

“It sounds like you’re making excuses for a friend,” Wilson observed. “Did you cover for him when he was with his mistress? When he was having a good time with this Nina woman?”

“Mistresses,” Kade corrected. “And no, Miko was discreet. I never needed to cover for him. But he wouldn’t have asked me.”

“Why?” Paige wondered.

“I guess the simple answer is we have different values,” Kade said carefully. “I told Miko it was wrong, but he blamed his Italian heritage and said it was natural. He joked he was a lover and he couldn’t change his spots.”

“You said mistresses,” Wilson circled back. “We know about Nina. Can you give us any other names?”

“I—” Kade considered. “Is that necessary?”

“There are a few common motives or reasons people kill,” Paige informed him. “Greed or financial gain, jealousy, and revenge are at the top. Understanding that, you can see why we need to speak with the women he had affairs with.”

“I understand,” Kade nodded.

Fatal Fashion

“I’d also like your opinion on each of the women,” Wilson added. “What I mean by that is their temperament. Let’s start with Nina Wimmer. Were they still dating, and do you think she’s capable of harming Miko?”

“Um, no,” Kade decided. “He wasn’t seeing Nina when he died. They broke up a few months before he was killed.”

“Did she resent him?” Paige wondered.

“I don’t think so,” Kade hesitated. “I think she wanted more and when she realized he would not give her what she wanted, she ended the relationship.”

“Do you think she could have poisoned him?” Wilson asked.

“I don’t think so,” Kade decided. “She has a temper, but I don’t think she’d poison him. If she was angry, I think she would have punched him in the face.”

“Alright,” Paige jotted down a few notes. “Who was he seeing at the time of his death?”

“Another model,” Kade admitted. “Celina Mosele.”

“Was she at the fashion show?” Wilson asked as he skimmed through his notes. “I’m not seeing her name on the witness list.”

“No,” Kade frowned. “I believe she was out of town at another show at the time.”

“Alright,” Paige considered. “Someone put the poison in Miko’s hand lotion. That seems reckless to me. How did they know it wouldn’t harm someone else?”

“Nobody used Miko’s hand lotion but Miko,” Kade insisted. “It was a special formula that was developed just for him.”

“So, he was targeted,” Paige decided. “Okay, who else? Give us the names of other women he had relations with.”

“They were all models,” Kade admitted. “He um — well, I think it was easier that way. I saw Lena at his apartment a few months back — Lena Wolfe, but she’s timid and a little shy. I don’t think she could hurt him if she wanted to.”

“Wait,” Wilson interrupted. “Miko had an apartment?”

“Yeah,” Kade nodded. “It was a small studio apartment. He did a lot of work there, so Venus didn’t question it, but it made it — convenient when he wanted to hook up.”

“I need the information on that apartment,” Wilson demanded.

Fatal Fashion

Kade provided the address. “The only other woman I know for sure he was seeing was Lia Steiner. That lasted the longest, I think. She um — she didn’t take it well when Miko broke things off. It got to the point we couldn’t use her at our shows any longer. She’d cause a scene and upset the other models.”

“Are you saying she got dumped, and she lost her job?” Paige asked.

“No,” Kade didn’t hesitate. “She didn’t lose her job. She still models for other designers, and we didn’t damage her rep or anything. We just stopped using her at our shows.”

“Still, that had to be a blow,” Paige insisted. “I mean, she was no longer working for a top designer. She had to lose money — at least at first.”

“Maybe a little,” Kade agreed. “But I talked to a friend, he’s a competitor, but he’s a friend, and he’s been using Lia in his shows.”

“Do you know how to get ahold of Lia?” Wilson wondered.

“No, but I can give you the name and contact information of my friend. He should know how to find her,” Kade offered.

“That would be great,” Paige sat back. “Anyone else?”

“There could have been others,” Kade shrugged. “Those are the ones I know of, but there could have been others. I wouldn’t rule out the possibility of flings, you know a single night but no follow-up.”

“Alright,” Paige glanced at Wilson.

“And you’re sure Venus didn’t know,” Wilson pressed again. “She had access to his lotion, and she’s the most likely suspect.”

“She didn’t know,” Kade said confidently. “She would have told me and she’d never mentioned it.”

“If a model did this,” Paige began. “If I said it was one of the models, who do you think did it?”

“I don’t know,” Kade shifted uncomfortably. “I don’t want to name anyone. What if I’m wrong? I know how it feels to be accused of something you didn’t do. I’m not willing to do that to anyone.”

“Who had access to the lotion?” Wilson questioned. “You said he was the only one to use it but who had access?”

Fatal Fashion

“Basically everyone,” Kade answered. “Miko always had a bottle in his private area. No matter where we put on a show, Miko needed a private space, and he kept his lotion in that space. Normally, it wasn’t all that secluded, just an area he could go to. That night, it was open, and anyone could have tampered with it.”

“Is there anything else you can tell us?” Paige wondered. “Anything that could lead us to a suspect. Did he offend a competitor? Did anyone accuse him of stealing their designs? Shortchange a supplier? Anything?”

“No,” Kade said, clearly offended. “None of that. Miko liked women, that was his only vice. We always respected everyone we did business with. People liked Miko — women liked him a little too much, but people liked him. I know this sounds bad, but Mike was a good man.”

“I think maybe that’s subjective,” Paige warned. “And I think there’s a good chance one of the women didn’t like being used and discarded. We need you to keep the things we talked about today to yourself. Scarlett said you two are no longer dating. If that has changed, it’s okay to talk to her because she already knows, but please keep what we discussed private. We need time to look into this new information and Detective Wilson needs time to search the apartment.”

“I’m going to get a warrant for that,” Wilson advised. “Until that comes through, I’m going to have the place under surveillance. Do not go to that apartment, take nothing out of that apartment, and do not discuss it with Venus.”

“I’m not seeing Scarlett,” Kade told them, clearly saddened by that. “I — well, I miss her but I think it’s too late for us. This thing, losing Miko, I don’t know how to get past it. There are days I can’t breathe, I can barely get out of bed and I don’t know how I’m going to survive.”

“Scarlett could help you with that,” Paige offered. “She seemed pretty smart. Have you considered bringing her in? She seems like someone you could rely on, and she understands the industry, she might be able to help you with the business.”

Kade stared at her, confused. “I hurt her, why would she help me?”

“Because it was obvious, she loves you,” Wilson offered. “And she believes in you. She was very open and vocal every time I spoke with her. She insisted from the very beginning that you didn’t hurt Miko. You should think about reconnecting, she might help you through your grief.”

“Am I still a suspect?” Kade had to know.

“You two were partners,” Wilson said carefully. “I can’t eliminate you completely, but I’m going to look into the women you discussed today. At this point, my investigation is moving in a different direction. I appreciate your willingness to come in today and speak with us. Your insights have been helpful.”

Fatal Fashion

“I guess that will have to be enough,” Kade sighed.

“I’m going to end this interview,” Paige decided. “Unless either of you have anything further, we need to discuss.”

“I’m signing off,” Wilson told her. “I want to get started on the warrant and I need to track down these women.”

Paige concluded the interview, then turned to Kade. “I’m sorry you felt like you had to come all the way to Utah, but I’m glad you spoke with us.”

“Do you really think Scarlett will forgive me?” Kade knew he should focus on the case, on finding Miko’s killer, but he missed Scarlett and wanted her back more than he wanted anything at the moment.

“It was obvious she loves you,” Paige shrugged. “If you’re honest with her, she might take you back. I can’t say but I know, if it was me, I’d give it a try. What do you have to lose?”

“Everything,” Kade frowned.

“Haven’t you already lost everything?” Paige asked.

“I suppose,” Kade stood and held out a hand. “Thank you for your time.”

“Drive safe,” Paige stood. “And if you think of anything else, feel free to call me or Detective Wilson.”

Paige watched him leave, then turned to her computer. She had new leads to follow. The first thing she planned to do was investigate each of the women Miko was involved with. Her gut was telling her it was one of them. Cyanide poisoning sounded like revenge from a spurned lover to her. They just had to figure out which one. She glanced at the phone when it rang. “Deputy Carter.”

“I’m working on a warrant for the apartment,” Wilson greeted. “And I have my guys running complete backgrounds on the other women. But I’m curious, do you think the wife is really in the dark? I mean, he could have cheated one too many times, and she got sick of it.”

“I wouldn’t rule her out,” Paige admitted. “But she doesn’t strike me as a brilliant mastermind. In fact, I’m not sure that woman would know where to get cyanide let alone what to do with it once she had it. Kade and Scarlett said innocent and naïve, but I say clueless.”

“I’ve talked to her,” Wilson told her. “Several times and you’re right, that woman is not the sharpest knife in the drawer. Still —”

Fatal Fashion

“You can’t eliminate her completely,” Paige nodded. “You said you’ve been looking into purchases of cyanide and couldn’t connect it to Kade. What about any of the women he just mentioned?”

“The records are in the file,” Wilson told her. “Once I deal with the pressing issues, I’ll sit down and go through those again. They’re long and tedious but we could get lucky.”

“I’ll take those,” Paige offered. “You deal with the warrant and searching the apartment. I’m sure there will be prints and you might want to interview this Celina woman. Sounds like they were currently involved. Could be there was trouble in paradise.”

“Right,” Wilson agreed. “I’ll call you tomorrow, or immediately if I find something. Can I count on you to do the same?”

“Of course,” Paige frowned. “I’m not keeping anything from you.”

“I know,” Wilson agreed. “That came out wrong.”

“I’ll talk to you tomorrow,” Paige decided. Once they disconnected, she sorted through the file and found the records listing the different companies that had purchased products containing cyanide.

“How’s the case coming?” Jericho dropped into the chair across from her.

“Huh?” Paige looked up. “Oh, we have some new leads to follow. I’m just trying to figure out where a model might access enough cyanide to mix it with lotion and poison their lover.”

“So this is about jealousy or rejection?” Jericho wondered. “Sounds like you are making progress.”

“I think so,” Paige sat back.

“Are any of the models dating a photographer?” Jericho offered. “Or do they have a family member that works in textiles or plastics?”

“Why?” Paige considered. “I wonder if they use cyanide to dye the fabric blue. We’re talking high fashion and what the public doesn’t know — she trailed off.

“Trying to track the poison might be the same as finding a needle in a haystack,” Jericho warned. “There are too many possibilities.”

Paige pulled out the large stack of papers. “Wilson already did the legwork. I just need to scan through this and see if a name matches our new suspect list.”

“Do that after lunch,” Jericho stood. “I’m starving and I’m buying.”

Fatal Fashion

“Alright,” Paige set the file aside and joined him.

They were on their way back to the office when they were called into the backcountry on an injured four-wheeler. Paige manned the radio while Jericho managed the operation. It was almost six by the time they got back to the office. She gathered up the file and headed home.

“Late night,” Dax observed. “And it looks like you have homework.”

“I have to go through these printouts and see if I can find anyone associated with the models,” she sighed and dropped the file onto the table.

“Sounds boring,” Dax decided.

“More like tedious,” Paige corrected. “That smells great, what is it?”

“Beef stew that Katie made,” he said absently. “Go wash up, let’s eat.”

They had finished dinner and moved to the family room to lounge in front of the fire. Paige was working, Dax was watching some documentary on firearms when Detective Wilson called.

“Did you find something?” Paige answered. “Because I’m about to throw the last of this enormous stack of papers in the fire and call it a night.”

“Focus on Lia Steiner,” he told her.

“Why?” Paige sat up.

“Because I found a file from an attorney,” Wilson told her. “In his apartment. He was trying to get a restraining order against her. And the motion his attorney prepared is very interesting.”

“Really?” Paige considered. “So, Kade getting her a job with a competitor didn’t appease her after all.”

“Not even a little,” Wilson grinned. “She was harassing him. Miko blocked her calls on his cell phone, but she started stalking him and she threatened to harass his wife.”

“I’m guessing that would have put a wrench in all that marital bliss,” Paige said sarcastically.

“Hey, he’s a lover,” Wilson laughed. “I’m going to bring her in tomorrow. If you want in, I can arrange it. It would be nice if we had evidence showing she had access to the cyanide.”

“I’ll see what I can find, and I definitely want in,” Paige decided.

“I’ll let you know once I arrange it,” Wilson promised. “Don’t work too late. If we can’t find the poison before the interview, we’ll trace it. It’s only a matter of time. I have a good feeling about this. I think we found our killer.”

Fatal Fashion

“I agree,” Paige told him, then clicked off.

“Good news?” Dax wondered.

They talked for over an hour, Paige explaining the interview with Kade and the recent developments. “Kade’s attitude baffled me. He doesn’t agree with the cheating despite that, he’s willing to defend his friend and even help him hide it. Then, he insisted Miko is a good man that loves his wife. He’s just an artist that needs to be stimulated.”

“I’m not an artist, but I could use a little stimulation,” Dax grinned.

“Not funny,” Paige elbowed him.

“I don’t understand cheating, Paige,” Dax sobered. “So, if you’re asking me to explain it, I can’t. I’m yours, forever. I’m not even interested in another woman and for a guy to say he loves his wife, but he has needs — that’s insulting. Why couldn’t he get his stimulation from his wife that he supposedly cherishes?”

“Exactly,” Paige pointed at him.

“Do you need to finish that tonight?” he wondered.

“No,” Paige focused on the file. “I’ll work on it in the morning.”

“Good,” he took her hand, pulled her to her feet, and followed her up the stairs.

“I have Lia Steiner coming in this afternoon,” Wilson told her. “You still in?”

“Absolutely,” Paige sat back. “And I think I found your poison.”

“Seriously?” Wilson asked, surprised. “How? Where?”

Paige laughed. “Calm down. I found a guy by the name of Clint Steiner that works at a plastics plant in Henderson. If you can link Clint to Lia, you’ve got your cyanide.”

“I’ll look into it,” Wilson promised. “I’ll try to have answers before the interview.”

“Sounds good,” Paige agreed. “I’ll be ready for your call.”

Several hours later, Paige was inside the conference room once again attending an interview by video. She studied Lia Steiner and had to admit, at least to herself, she didn’t like her. The woman was arrogant and condescending. Too bad she was going to spend the rest of her natural life behind bars — okay that wasn’t bad, it was good. She waited while Wilson recited Miranda.

Fatal Fashion

“I asked you here today to discuss Miko Sciarra’s murder,” Wilson told her. “During the course of our investigation, we’ve discovered the two of you were having an affair. Can you tell us about that?”

Lia smirked. “What would you like to know, sweetie? Our favorite position, what we did in the shower — you want some pointers, honey?”

“Not from you,” Wilson said without hesitation. “I’ll take that as an admission that you were engaged in an intimate relationship with Miko.”

“You should be a detective,” Lia smirked.

“How long? Did you have more than one date before you got dumped?” Paige asked.

“Not that it’s any of your business but we dated for several months,” Lia raised her chin in defiance.

“And then you got dumped?” Paige asked. “Did he tell you why?”

“It was a mutual decision,” Lia barked.

Wilson slid the motion for a restraining order across the table. “Doesn’t sound like there was anything mutual about it.”

Lia glanced down then shoved the papers across the table. “Fine, he said he loved me. I told him to leave his wife, and he broke things off with me. He seriously thought he could just say it was over and I’d go away without a fight.”

“How did you fight?” Wilson asked. “I told him I was going to contact his wife. I tried to corner her, to tell her what her precious husband was doing, but she’s sheltered and difficult to approach.”

“What did Miko do?” Paige asked.

“He threatened me,” Lia growled. “That man thought he could threaten me, and I would just cave.”

“Threatened you with what?” Paige pushed.

“Who are you and why are you even here?” Lia barked.

“Detective Wilson already explained that but I guess you didn’t understand the first time. I’m Deputy Carter and I’m helping Detective Wilson investigate the murder of Miko — the man you claim threatened you.”

Fatal Fashion

“He threatened me,” Lia yelled. “He fired me and told me if I didn’t stop, he would make sure I never worked again. He had no right. I was his best model.”

“So, he had to pay?” Paige offered.

Lia smirked. “I guess he did.”

“Did Clint know what you planned to do with the cyanide?” Wilson asked.

“What?” Lia asked, shocked. “Who?”

“Your brother,” Wilson sat back. “Did he know you planned to use the cyanide to kill your former lover?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Lia’s eyes darted around the room.

“Are you saying Clint isn’t your brother?” Wilson asked.

“No,” Lia hesitated. “I’m not saying that. I have a brother named Clint, but I don’t know what you think he did.”

“I think you are so calloused and vindictive that you used your brother — with or without his knowledge — to get revenge on a man that had the nerve to dump you.” Paige offered. “You threatened his wife, acted on those threats, and as a result, you lost your job.”

“So, what if all of that is true,” Lia faked confidence. “I might have reacted to the shock after Miko tossed me aside for that skanky no talent dog, Lena Wolfe. And he refused to dump his pathetic, weak wife, but you can’t prove I did anything about it.”

“Tell us about Miko’s lotion,” Paige challenged. She was trying to keep Lia off balance, and it seemed to work. She was getting erratic, and it was only a matter of time before she lost it and slipped up.

“What lotion?” Lia looked away.

“Come on, Lia,” Wilson studied her. “Everyone knows about Miko’s lotion. He has it special made and keeps it in his personal area at each show. He had a skin condition, that wasn’t a secret. Acting like you don’t know what Carter is talking about only makes you look suspicious.”

“Yeah, so what?” Lia challenged. “Miko had a special lotion. What does that have to do with me?”

“Did he ever have you pick up a fresh supply before a show?” Paige asked.

Fatal Fashion

“What?” Lia focused on the large screen. The woman was trying to trap her. Did she know something or was she fishing?

“Did you ever get Miko’s lotion for him?” Wilson asked.

“Maybe,” Lia shrugged. “I can’t remember.”

“If you did,” Paige pushed. “Did you give it to him? Or did you ever forget and keep it? Or maybe you kept it because you wanted to try it.”

“No,” Lia shook her head. “I never kept the stupid lotion.”

Wilson set an evidence bag on the table. “Can you explain this? We executed a search warrant and found that lotion in your bathroom. We’re analyzing the lotion to see if it matches the special medicated lotion that Miko used but it looks the same to me.”

“He must have left it at my house,” Lia insisted. “I didn’t know it was there, but Miko must have left it there.”

“Are you saying Miko spent time at your home? That he came over, had dinner, had a relaxing movie night, or maybe he spent the night with you?” Paige challenged.

“Yeah,” Lia lied. “He spent tons of time at my place.”

“That’s odd,” Paige pretended to consider. “Because during the course of our investigation we determined, without exception, that Miko only spent time with his mistresses at his studio apartment. He insisted on it and never, ever visited the homes of the women he was seeing. It was his way of controlling the situation and making sure his wife didn’t discover his — extracurricular activities.”

“Things were different with me,” Lia insisted. “He loved me, and things progressed. We didn’t have the restrictions as the others.”

“How do you know?” Paige wondered. “How do you know what he did with others?”

“Everybody knows,” Lia shrugged, but she was starting to panic.

“It would be better for you if you just told us what happened,” Wilson told her. “We know the cyanide came from the factory where Clint works. We know you had access to Miko’s lotion, and we found a partially used bottle of Miko’s lotion in your apartment. We also know you were threatening to harass his wife and Miko asked his attorney to file that motion with the courts to get a restraining order against you. What we don’t know is why you did it.”

“It was self-defense,” Lia blurted. “Yeah, it was self-defense. He was trying to destroy me. He threatened me and I didn’t have a choice.”

Fatal Fashion

“Miko threatened to get a restraining order and interfere with your job, so you poisoned him, knowing he’d use his hand lotion at the private fashion show he was organizing?” Wilson asked.

“Yes, I have a right to protect myself,” Lia insisted.

“And did Clint know what you planned?” Paige pushed.

“Clint is an idiot,” Lia barked. “He didn’t know anything. He doesn’t even know I stole that cyanide. He was too busy showing off and didn’t see me take it.”

“I’m pretty sure she just confessed to premeditated murder,” Paige offered. “I think that means my job here is done.”

Wilson opened the door and motioned for two uniformed officers to escort Lia out. “Take her down to the jail. I’ll prepare the PC statement. It should be there before you’re finished.”

“Wait, what?” Lia screamed. “I said I was defending myself.”

“Uh-huh,” Paige rolled her eyes. Once she could no longer hear Lia she focused on Wilson. “Looks like we’re finished here. You found your man, made an arrest and closed your case.”

“Thank you, Paige,” Wilson said sincerely. “I appreciate all your help on this. Now, I get to pay Venus a visit and let her know we arrested her husband’s killer.”

“Will you notify Kade?” Paige wondered.

“Once I’m finished with the wife, I’ll hook up with Kade. He has a right to know. I’m not sure we would have closed this if it wasn’t for Kade’s help.”

“I agree,” Paige smiled. “It’s been a pleasure. Let me know if I can ever do anything for you in the future.” She hung up, glanced at Jericho’s open door, and stood. She had just enough time to catch him up before it was time to head home. She didn’t want to be late tonight. The boys were planning a dinner party, probably the last one of the year.

Paige stepped outside and settled into a chair across from Gage. “What are you doing out here? It’s not like you to be antisocial.”

Gage grinned. “Not antisocial. I was just getting a little fresh air. It’s a little stuffy inside with all that testosterone wafting around.”

Fatal Fashion

“You played professional football, Gage,” Paige laughed. “You spent hours in a locker room with half-naked men pounding their chests and bragging about their stats.”

“True,” Gage grinned. “But enough about me. How are you doing? I hear you closed another case.”

“I helped,” Paige corrected. “Detective Wilson did all the heavy work.”

Gage studied her and wondered if he should keep his opinion to himself or share it.

“What?” Paige demanded.

“I was just thinking you’re good at that,” Gage offered. “Maybe you should do it full time.”

“How?” Paige shook her head. “The mayor, the council, the citizens would never go for that. And they shouldn’t. It’s not fair to force our people to pay for me to solve crimes for other agencies. This is just temporary until after I have the baby.”

“It doesn’t have to be,” Gage pushed. “Your husband runs a successful training center. You could join him, instruct cops, share your knowledge and experience with them, and work cases on the side.”

Paige frowned. “I’m a cop, Gage. This is what I do. Once the baby comes, everything will get back to normal and I’ll be out there handling calls again instead of sitting in the office, analyzing cold cases.

“But —” Gage started.

“Drop it,” Paige insisted. “I have enough changes in my life. I don’t need to come up with additional ways I can force change into my life.”

“Burgers are done,” Dax called and headed for the house.

“Saved by the bell,” Gage stood. “I’ll shut up, but you should think about it.”

“Think about what?” Paige asked.

Gage didn’t answer, he had already disappeared inside the house.