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Pretty Girl Thirteen

Written by Liz Coley

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Pretty
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Thirteen
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PROLOGUE

LOST TIME

YOU HAD FORGOTTEN HOW EARLY THE SUN RISES ON SUMMER campouts—and how loud the birds sing in the morning. You scrunched down in your warm sleeping bag to block out the green light that seeped through the nylon tent, but there was no way you were going back to sleep until you took care of something. As you shrugged off the sleeping bag, you sighed.

“Sup, Angie?” Livvie’s whisper emerged from the folds of her sleeping bag.

Katie rustled lower into her plaid cocoon and pulled it closed over her head.

“I just have to go to the tree,” you answered, Girl Scout code for taking care of business.

“Anyone else up yet?” Liv cracked one eye and squinted at you.

“I don’t think so.” You sniffed. “No one’s started the break-fast fire.”

Liv’s one eye widened. “It’s not our turn, is it?”

“Nope. Go back to sleep.”

You unzipped the tent and slipped out into the fresh, pink morning. Rosy clouds lofted high above the trees. Pine needles underfoot muffled the sound of your flip-flops as you snuck away from the collection of tents. No one else was stirring. The sun hadn’t warmed the air yet, and the T-shirt you wore left your arms bare and goosebumpy.

A few thousand pine trees surrounded the clearing where the troop had pitched camp yesterday afternoon—lodge-pole, ponderosa, Jeffrey, sugar pines. Mrs. Wells had made you memorize their bark and needles to earn your tree-ID badge. You found the trail you’d tromped along yesterday to walk into the campsite and headed down it a little way, looking for a thicker stand of trees. That was about as much privacy as you could get in the great outdoors. Tiny ripe August thimbleberries lined the path, and you munched a few as an early breakfast, the tart red juice staining your lips and fingers. A fallen tree with a saucer-shaped fungus lay across the path, and you filed it away in your brain as a landmark. Then you left the path and headed twenty feet or more into the woods to a good squatting place.

You spun in a slow circle to shake off the feeling you always had out here that someone was watching, before you hitched down your sweatpants and crouched. It was an art, peeing in the woods without splashing your feet or clothes, at least for girls.

A twig snapped sudden as a rifle shot. Your heart bumped in shock. Your eyes swiveled toward the direction of the sound, expecting a squirrel. A rabbit. A deer. Anything but a man, who blended invisibly into the undergrowth except for his narrow, dark eyes—eyes that stared at you with an almost familiar hunger.

“Shhh.” He put a finger to his lips, walking toward you.

You struggled with your sweats, humiliation and shock making your hands clumsy. You couldn’t break your gaze from his eyes, couldn’t see his face for the intensity of the unblinking stare that held you. You opened your mouth to talk, to scream, to plead, but nothing came out—your throat tight, as if a noose looped it and he held the knot. A moment later, he reached for you. His right hand covered your mouth and his left held your arm behind your back in an unbreakable grip. You still hadn’t breathed.

“Don’t fight me, pretty girl,” he whispered, pressed against your body, his moist lips touching your ear.

Fight him? Your limbs were soft, weak. Your knees on the edge of collapse. You couldn’t even take a step, to run, to flee. How could you fight him? Your stomach clenched, and the

sound of wind rushed through your ears, a hurricane in your head.

Above the roar, you heard a little girl's high-pitched voice call, "Quick. Hide!"

I opened the rusted gate for you to slip inside.

Stabbing pain pierced between your temples. Still you stayed, frozen in his grip. We tugged, pulled at you until something broke loose. For just a moment, you contracted to a tiny, hard point of light, felt yourself cut away from your body.

You hid. We kept you hidden till it was safe.

It was a long, long time.



INTERROGATION

“GO BACK NOW,” A VOICE SAID. ANGIE FELT A POKE between her shoulder blades. She tripped forward a step, arms out to catch her balance.

“Don’t,” she protested, whirling to look behind, but no one else was there.

She shivered and shook her head to clear it. When the wave of dizziness passed, she opened her eyes again. She blinked hard at her street. Her cul-de-sac. Her neighborhood. The sun was halfway up the cloudless azure sky. Hot Santa Ana winds tousled the sweet gum trees. A hint of red tinged the edges of the falling leaves. Sharp-pointy seed-pods scattered across the sidewalk. In August?

An unexpected weight tugged at her left hand—just

a plastic grocery bag. Where was her camping gear? She hefted the bag to look inside, and that was when the strangeness hit her. She dropped it in surprise and studied her left hand. Something was really wrong here. This wasn't her hand. Those weren't her fingers. These fingers were longer, thinner than they were supposed to be. And a strange silver ring circled the middle finger. The skin was dry and rough. Dark scars circled the wrists like bracelets. She turned over her right hand, studying unfamiliar cracks and calluses on her palm. She clenched it experimentally. It felt . . . wrong.

Angie frowned and spun to look again behind her. How had she gotten here? She didn't remember walking this way. She was just . . . in the woods?

Her stomach growled, and her right hand flew to her waist—taut, thin. And where had this hideous shirt come from? Flowers and ruffles? Not her style at all. And no way would Liv or Katie have bought it. She wouldn't have borrowed it even if they had.

She picked up the bag and peeked at a collection of completely strange clothes. A sick feeling replaced the emptiness in her belly. Her head felt floaty, disoriented, disconnected.

Angie's eyes traced the houses around the cul-de-sac. Everything there was familiar, thank God. The cars in the driveways looked right, which was reassuring, until she caught sight of Mrs. Harris, pushing a stroller, just entering

her garage. Mrs. Harris didn't have kids.

She broke into a run, feeling for the first time the blisters on her feet, the ache in her legs. Home, she had to get home. Of course. She'd been lost, in the woods. Now she was home.

She felt under the woven grass mat for a key and opened the red front door. "Mom!" she yelled. "Hey, Mom, I'm home!" She stepped through.

Tumbling down the front stairs, feet sliding, face a screaming mask of disbelief, her mom burst into tears. She engulfed Angie in her arms, speechless, gulping.

"Mom!" Angie said into her hair. "Mom, I can't breathe." She dropped the bag of clothes with a small thump. She brushed a wisp of hair from her lips. Silver threads mingled with Mom's loose brown curls.

"Can't breathe . . . can't breathe?" Mom let go enough to hold Angie at arm's length and devour her face with her eyes. "Can't . . ." She laughed, a tight, hysterical bark. "Oh my God. Oh my God. A miracle! Thank you, God. Thank you." She raised her eyes to the ceiling. "Thank you," she said again.

Upstairs, a toilet flushed, and Dad's voice called down the stairs. "Margie, what's all the commotion?"

Mom whispered to Angie, "Oh, your father . . . He'll just . . ." She couldn't speak. Her face was white. Too round and white.

Dad's tread on the landing filled the pause. For a moment, he stood there, his hands plastered to his cheeks. His eyes met Angie's and filled with tears. "Angela? Are you really . . ." His voice choked off.

Angie looked back and forth between the two of them. "Um, yeah. I'm really . . . What's going on?" It wasn't just her. Something was wrong with her parents, too. A shiver passed across her shoulder blades.

"Angel?" Dad whispered the word. He stood on the landing, frozen in weirdness. His black hair was completely gray. His damp eyes looked a hundred years old.

Angie's heart began to race, and her feet tingled like they wanted to take off running. "You guys are totally freaking me out."

"We're freaking you . . . ?" Mom's hysterical laugh broke out again. "Angie, where . . . where have you been?"

"You know." Angie's stomach squirmed. "Camping?"

The way they stared and stared at her made it hard to breathe. "Camping," she said again, firmly.

Dad started down the stairs. "Camping," he repeated. "Camping?" His voice rose in pitch. "For three years?"

Angie locked the bathroom door and pressed her back against it. Her familiar towel set, cream with roses, hung on the rack, just where she'd left it. It smelled like Tide. She'd never been so happy to see a towel before. It was

perfect. It was right. Unlike her parents.

Were they kidding? Were they crazy? She couldn't have been missing for three years. That wasn't the kind of thing a person would . . . just forget.

She turned on the sink first, then glanced up at a face that looked back at her with clear gray eyes. In that moment of utter surprise, she forgot how to breathe.

The girl in the mirror could have been her older sister, taller, thinner. Her cheekbones were sculpted, where Angie's were soft and round. Her face was pale, where Angie's was tan from a summer at the pool. The girl had long, dirty-blond hair, where Angie's was highlighted and bobbed. The girl had serious arm muscles, gray skin, healed-up scars, and another thing that made the girl in the mirror a stranger. She had a curvy shape—breasts. Angie dropped her eyes to her chest. What the hell. Boobs? Where had those come from?

She fingered the top button on her shirt, scared to look.

A wooden pounding startled her. "Angela! Angela, for God's sake, don't do anything." Her father's voice sounded panicked. "Don't . . . don't . . ."

Angie turned the lock and opened the door. "I . . . I wasn't," she said. Her face flushed with guilt. For what?

Dad's face was drawn with tension. A bead of sweat stood out on his forehead. Angie was mesmerized by it. She realized only half his chin was shaved.

His gaze slipped to the right, avoiding her. His voice was low and hoarse. "Detective Brogan will be here in fifteen minutes. He said not to touch anything that might be considered evidence."

"Evidence of what?" Angie asked. The sound of running water filled the heavy silence while Dad hesitated over his answer. His attention darted to the sink.

"Oh God, Angela. You didn't wash anything yet. Right?"

She held up her filthy arms, dirt so embedded in her creases and pores that she had turned gray. "Evidence?" she repeated. "Of what, Dad?"

Dad's mouth twisted around for a few moments. The sweat rolled lower. "Evidence of whatever, wherever, or whoever."

Angie looked at him in confusion.

His forehead creased with lines. Dark hollows circled his eyes. "You really don't know what I'm talking about, do you?"

Angie felt stupid. He expected something from her. She didn't know what, but she could feel his anger simmering. Something stirred inside, and she walked to him and wrapped her arms around his waist. Her head came up to his chin. "I love you so much," she said. She felt him stiffen and pull back. She must have done the wrong thing. Her arms dropped. She turned cold, inside and out.

"I—I have to finish shaving," he said randomly, his

head turned away from her. “Shut off the water. Go wait downstairs with your mother.” He walked down the hall and closed the bedroom door behind him.

Angie had this vague idea that it might be a good idea to cry. But everything was tangled and frozen inside, seized up like the giant breath before pain arrives. She thought about chewing a fingernail, but it was dirty. And “evidence.” Her stomach clenched again. Evidence of what?

The unusual ring on her left hand caught her eye. Why couldn’t she remember where she’d bought it? The question made her strangely nervous, and the single warning throb of a headache coming on poked her temple. She twisted the silver band loose and placed it in the soap dish. The pain passed. It was probably Livvie’s, or Katie’s. Better not to think about it too hard.

The sound of Dad’s razor hummed as Angie hurried down the top flight of stairs. She stopped halfway, her feet pinned to the landing. She hovered like a lost child, halfway between Dad upstairs and Mom downstairs. Her pulse beat the passing seconds. Someone was coming. A detective, Dad said. She watched the front door until the frosted glass darkened with shadow.

Mom flew from the kitchen to answer the double knock.

A tall, ginger-haired man stood framed in the doorway. Mom threw herself into his arms with a muffled sob.

He patted Mom's back with one hand and looked over her head to the landing, where Angie still hesitated.

The man's eyes went wide. "Angela," he whispered. "Welcome home."

He separated himself from Mom and held out his right hand, palm up, half an invitation, half a handshake. "Please," he said. "Will you come down?"

Dad had called him a detective, but he was wearing blue jeans with a tear starting in one knee. The sleeves of his dark plaid shirt were rolled to the elbow. He looked casual, comfortable. He looked—amazed.

Angie took the four steps to the bottom and reached for his outstretched hand. It was huge, and hers disappeared as he pressed it between both of his.

"L.A. County Sheriff's Department. Detective Phil Brogan," he said. "Sorry to appear like this. I was gardening, and I didn't waste a moment when Mitch called." His hand was rough and calloused, but he held hers like a newborn kitten, with care and tenderness. He tilted his head and studied her face with a tiny smile.

Angie's tension began melting away, her chill warming, until the moment he ruined it.

"This is incredible," he said. "I feel like I know you already."

She instantly felt stripped, exposed. A complete stranger who knew her. Her breath caught in a gasp. She caged the

sob before it could escape. If she let it start, she might never stop.

“Lord, I’m sorry, Angela,” he said immediately. He let her hand slither away. “Mitch told me on the phone there might be memory issues. That you aren’t sure how long you were gone or where exactly you were. Disorientation. That’s not unusual.”

Was that true? Angie tried to decipher his eyes. Blue, kind, honest. She didn’t read a threat there. Okay. So maybe what was happening to her wasn’t unusual. She felt a flicker of hope. Maybe he could actually help her figure this out.

She nodded, and he smiled gently. “Come.” He gestured to the family room with his head. “We don’t have to stand here like bowling pins.”

A clunk sounded upstairs, and Angie imagined a giant ball rolling down the stairs, knocking them all off their unsteady feet, but it was only Dad. The corner of her mouth twitched. The detective caught it and smiled back with his eyes. Fascinating eyes. Orange specks dotted the dark blue irises. She’d never seen anything like them.

Dad walked ahead without sparing her a glance and clicked on the fire with the remote. “She looks cold,” he offered as explanation. Of course, the heat from the gas fire, locked safely behind glass doors, was too weak to reach her.

Angie made a full sweep of the room, finding everything familiar and in its place. Soft green cushions on the beige leather sofas. Floor-length drapes with leaf patterns, pulled back to let in the daylight. Old cabinet-style TV with the remote and printed guide on top. Piles of jumbled books in the bookcase on the side wall. There was no way three years had passed in this room. No way. Nothing had moved.

The detective settled into the chair closest to Angie's corner of the sofa. His expression softened, and he rubbed the palm of his hand across his stubbly chin. "Angela, I'm so sorry. I know this is difficult for you. Very confusing."

Did he? Angie wondered. Had his reality ever changed in the blink of an eye? She studied her shabby knees. They turned blurry as she squeezed away dangerous tears. Stop.

Brogan placed a featherlight hand on her bowed head. "I imagine all you want to do right now is reunite with your family and be left in peace."

She nodded a fraction of an inch, grateful for his sympathy. She could tell he meant it—he understood how unstable she was. At least, it didn't feel like just a police technique to warm her up for questioning.

Beside her, Mom squeezed her hand, and Angie looked up into the detective's steady gaze. Unexpected freckles dusted his cheekbones. "But . . .," she offered, sensing he was leading up to "but."

“But my job is to figure out whether we have a criminal case to pursue here. Especially if we have a fresh trail. Do you understand?”

Her throat suddenly got the “I’m about to throw up” feeling. She swallowed it down. “Criminal? Did I . . . Did I do something wrong?”

“Not you, Angie,” Mom burst out, her fingers accidentally digging into Angie’s palm. Angie flinched.

“Margie.” Brogan raised his eyebrows at Mom. “Sorry, Angela. There are just a few questions I need to ask you right now. Then we’ll move on to other procedures.”

“There are a few things I want to know too,” Dad interrupted. “How on earth did you find your way home, Angela? Did anyone help you? Did you walk the whole way?”

“Yes.” The single word escaped her lips, but it didn’t make any sense. From where? Angie had no idea.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Mitch,” Mom said, shushing him. “It’s more than thirty miles to where she disappeared.”

“Downhill,” Angie whispered. No one heard her. Where had that thought come from?

“Besides,” Mom continued, “she could have been anywhere. Out of California entirely.”

Brogan stood up and began a slow pace across the room. Angie followed him with her eyes. He’d changed—not a comfortable guy in torn jeans anymore. The soft sympathy

face was gone. He was a panther, hunting. A cop, patrolling. She put herself on guard.

His voice changed too—it was flatter, clipped. “Angela. Any idea how long you were gone? Any hint of location? Anything at all?”

“No! I . . . uh, no. No idea.” Angie gestured to her parents. “They say it was three years. But . . . I don’t know. That doesn’t seem right. It was just a couple of days.”

“Did you run away on purpose?”

Angie’s forehead wrinkled. “Run away? No. Of course not.”

“No trouble at home? At school? At church? You didn’t need a break? From something? Or someone?” His gaze was probing, encouraging, and scary, all at the same time. He paced and watched and listened.

“No. What are you talking about? Everything’s fine. Was. Fine.”

Mom slid an arm around her. Angie leaned into the hug to prove her point.

Brogan nodded. He spoke slowly and carefully. “Did you arrange to meet someone? Did you visit an internet site and become close to an interesting person?”

“I’m not an idiot! No and no.” What stupid questions. Exhaustion gripped her. What did she have to say to end all of this?

The detective shrugged. “Okay. We didn’t find a trace of

that kind of history on the computers you use at home or at school. Still worth asking, though.”

Dad finally quit standing watch and dropped into the other armchair with a loud sigh of relief. What was he was thinking? That she would actually sneak off with someone?

Brogan caught Dad’s eye and gave him a “watch yourself here” look. It was easy to read the detective’s face. “Angela, have you ever experimented with alcohol or drugs? A lot of kids your age have. Answer honestly—we won’t be angry or shocked, and we can get you help.”

“You can tell us, hon,” Mom said. “We won’t judge. I swear.”

Dad looked like he might, though, his elbows grinding a hole in his knees.

Mom patted his arm and said in an obvious aside, “That could explain her fuzziness on the details.”

Angie groaned. “No, I haven’t. I’ve never drunk anything but Communion wine. I’ve never tried drugs. Just a cigarette. Which was completely gross, by the way.”

“May I see your hands?” Brogan asked. It wasn’t a request. It was an order.

She rolled her eyes and wordlessly stuck her arms out. They were too long, too thin, too pale, and she imagined they were someone else’s arms stuck on her body. Brogan traced the unfamiliar scars on her wrists with a

finger, flipped the hands over to examine the short, ragged nails, then back over to the dirty, rough palms. His finger explored the groove left by the ring on her middle finger, the cleaner, paler skin revealed.

He met her eyes with a question. “Know anything about this?”

A knifelike pain hit her behind the ear. She winced and shook her head, which he took to mean no. The ache drifted away. Her head cleared. It felt like fog lifting.

He pursed his lips. “Humor me a sec. Arm wrestle me.” He dropped into the chair again and set his elbow on the coffee table, thumb up.

“You’ll win. Your hands are huge,” Angie predicted. “Plus your arm is much longer than mine.”

One side of his mouth smiled. “Humor me. Please?”

Angie snorted. “Right.” She grasped his hand and pushed. Her smaller fingers disappeared in his grip, but his arm wavered. He pressed back. She met him with resistance, startled at the strength of her skinny arm. Lean muscle bulged. Without warning, his arm gave way and she flattened him. “You let me win,” she accused.

“Maybe a little. You’ve obviously been doing manual labor. For a long time. You’re very strong for your size.”

“Oh my God.” Mom erupted from her seat, hands twisting. “Manual labor? White slavery, do you think?”

How lame, Angie thought. But Brogan seemed to take

the question seriously. “No, Margie. Not likely. She’s been relatively local.”

“Local? All this time?” Dad’s voice trembled oddly. “What makes you say that?”

“Her clothes smell of pine sap and wood smoke.”

Angie sniffed her sleeve. He was right. Well, of course, that made sense. Didn’t she make s’mores around the campfire only last night? Smells don’t linger for three years.

“Of course,” she said simply. “I was camping.”

“You remember nothing else?” Brogan asked.

This was getting exasperating. “Look,” she said. “I told you. All of you. I don’t remember anything else. I was camping. Then I was here. I don’t remember being driven home or dropped off or walking. Nothing. I was just here.”

“Angela, how tall are you?” The detective held his palms to her parents to keep them from jumping in.

“Five-one,” she answered without hesitation. In her side vision, Mom’s head shook slightly.

“And how much do you weigh?”

“That’s kind of personal, isn’t it?” she asked.

Brogan gave a full-faced smile for the first time. “Sorry. Yes. And I’m terrible at guessing. A hundred and ten?”

“Wow. You are terrible.”

“Told you.” He was honest, anyway, and his grin was contagious. “Sorry. More?”

Angie laughed, for the first time. “Ninety-five, last time

I checked.” Her laugh sounded creaky, hoarse, unused.

“And how old are you?”

“Thirteen,” she said.

Mom started to open her mouth. A hissed “Si—” escaped before Brogan cut her off.

Dad missed the gesture. “She’s sixteen,” he insisted. “You’re sixteen now, Angela. Don’t you understand what we’ve been telling you?”

Angie’s head buzzed. What was wrong with everybody? Dad was so stiff and angry—he only ever called her Angela when she was in trouble. She was supposed to be his little Angel. But she hadn’t done anything wrong, except maybe get lost. And that wasn’t her fault. And besides . . . she was home now.

Anger bubbled up from nowhere. “Will you stop this stupid game? I’m thirteen.” Her voice caught in her throat. “I’m thirteen.”

Tears blurred her view of the detective’s face, but she spoke straight to him in tight, furious words. “I’m Angela Gracie Chapman. In three weeks, I’m starting eighth grade at La Cañada High School. I’m thirteen years old. And I think I’ve been lost. But I don’t know for sure. I want to take a shower and eat and go to bed.” She crossed her arms tightly across her chest, trying to ignore the soft bumps that weren’t supposed to be there.

Mom stood. She placed an arm around Angie’s shoulder,

like a magic cloak of protection. “Detective. She’s right. We all need a little adjustment time here. Can’t this be finished later?”

Angie felt such a rush of relief. Mom would get rid of everyone and tuck her into bed, and when she woke up, everything would be normal again.

“I’m sorry, Margie. I wish we could.” Brogan focused on Angie. “As far as the question of your memory, Angela, I think we’re dealing with some retrograde amnesia and post-traumatic stress here. You know what that is?”

“I can’t remember anything because I’m too freaked out,” she snapped.

“Something like that. I’d like you to meet with our best forensic psychologist as soon as possible. Mitch, Margie, I’ll set up the appointment and call you.”

“So are we done?” Angie asked, just about on her last blip of energy.

“Right after the medical exam,” Brogan said. “I’ll call ahead and expedite it.”

Dad turned his attention to something beyond the window. His expression was absolutely flat, like a stone statue. His shoulders hunched up to his ears.

“Oh, come on, Phil,” Mom protested. “Is that necessary? Now? She’s exhausted. Look at her.”

Brogan caught the desperate, pathetic look Angie threw him. His mouth turned down, and he switched back into

the guy with a hole in his knee. “Yeah. I know. But we have to. I’m so, so sorry.”

Why did he keep apologizing? It didn’t change anything.

Brogan lowered his voice, even though there was no one else to overhear. He spoke to Dad’s back, not to her. “Angela has obviously been living with someone. She hasn’t been on the street. She hasn’t been starved. She’s been taken care of. There may be important DNA evidence. We don’t want to let any more time elapse before collecting it.”

“From her clothes?” Mom asked. “We can just give them to you.”

The detective gave Mom a pointed look and, finally, swiveled his attention to Angie. “Angela, without being able to rely on your memory, we need to see whether you’ve been sexually assaulted.”

Angie’s temper flared again. “Just say it, Detective. Don’t spare my feelings. Raped. You want to know if I’ve been raped. Don’t you think I’d know? Don’t you think I’d remember something like that?” Her chest heaved, as if she’d just finished a mile run.

“Do you remember, Angie?” he asked gently.

The image of narrow, dark eyes flashed through her mind and vanished in a spasm of pain. Then her mind was empty, clear—her anger evaporated as if the storm in her head had just died. She was calm. Blank. Relieved. Safe.

“No. Nothing. I don’t remember anything.”

“My point exactly,” he said.

“Can I please shower after?”

“Absolutely. Margie, please bring her a change of clothes, since we’ll need to keep these.”

In the front hallway, he snapped on a pair of rubber gloves and picked up the grocery bag. “Do you know what’s in here, Angela?”

She shrugged. “Just some clothes, I think.”

“Recognize this?” He pulled out a checkered blouse.

She shook her head. A queasy feeling started up again in her stomach.

He probed lower and removed a yellow apron. Angie wrinkled her nose. “Nope.”

He reached in again and retrieved a tiny, black lace cami.

“Good God,” Dad said, turning pale. His hands combed roughly through his hair and locked behind his head.

Angie felt her own hands tremble. “Not . . . not my style,” she said lightly. A lump formed in her throat. Where had she gotten these things?

Brogan reached into the bag again. “Ah. No wonder it’s so heavy. Recognize this?”

She squinted at *The Joy of Cooking* in his hand. “Mom has that one. I don’t really cook.”

At the bottom of the bag was the strangest thing—a slim

metal bar, pointed on one end, flat on the other. Brogan balanced it across his gloved palm. “Recognize it?” he asked, in a tone that was supposed to be casual but immediately put Angie on guard again.

“No. What is it?” Angie asked.

“Looks like a shiv. An improvised knife.”

“Why would that be in there?” Angie asked.

Brogan watched her with his orange-flecked panther eyes. “My guess is that you packed the things most precious to you. This might have been used for self-defense or—”

“I’ve never, ever seen that before,” Angie said quickly. The edge of the metal looked wicked sharp. Dangerous. “How much damage could you do with a little knife like that?” she asked.

“Oh, no doubt it could kill someone,” Brogan said calmly. “If you knew how to use it.” The way he lingered on “you” gave her shivers.