



Gut Feelings

When you've known someone for a long time you can begin to guess what they are going to say, finish their sentences for them, but Corinne has a special gift that goes beyond being able to answer a question. Corinne's feelings come to her out of nowhere, sometimes she knows what they are and other times there is an overwhelming sense inside of her that she has to figure something out. This latest one packs a wallop and it will upturn her whole family. The bigger question is, will it ruin or rescue her?



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Lou likes her long-time friend Corinne for many reasons, they’ve known each other since they were kids and growing up with Corinne has never been dull, to say the least. There was the time she said the slide felt wrong and reported it to the teacher and when the teacher slid down to prove there is nothing wrong, the whole slide disconnected from the playset. The whole playground laughed except for Corinne, she went up to the teacher and reminded her that she had already told her there was something wrong.

Corinne feels things that no one else does, as an adult she has learned how to harness these feelings and look into the cause. Which is why she went into engineering, to design new toys, she knew what was wrong with so many of the ones she had as a child. Lou loved going shopping with her because she could tell which items were of inferior construction by how they “felt” to her. Some of the children they hung around would laugh at her but then would complain when their toys broke. The best thing about Corinne is that she would never say ‘I told you so’, she always said she felt sorry for the child who lost a toy.

However, there were also times when Corinne’s feelings were dangerous. Like the time she knew that they should not go to school on time, so she and Lou delayed themselves while walking to school as much as they could. By the time they came to school, the fire engines were already there putting out the fire that had started in the cafeteria during breakfast. A place they would have been in with all the rest of the early morning students. Many of them had smoke inhalation.

Or the time she took out her phone to take a picture, which appeared random to Lou, while in a bank. Then she pulled Lou out of the bank and they waited in her car. Soon enough the people she took pictures of had pulled down masks and robbed the bank, Corinne had their picture and when the police came, she gave them her phone claiming she was taking pictures for decorating ideas and they happen to be in them. Corinne’s honest face is why they believed her so easily.

For five years Corinne was married to a complete scumbag but she told Lou numerous times that she had to stay because the kids needed a mother, theirs had died when they were young and needed something in their life to stay stable. Their father flew all around the world for business, or so he told her. Lou is convinced he had more than one “secretary” that he took on these excursions to play with, but Corinne insisted that this is not the case because appearances were too big a part of him.

Corinne is an average looking woman who happens to have an above average shaped body. It’s 90% genetics, she had no choice in what she received, she does not dress like most women would though. She plays her shape down but always looks very well put together and very stylish. Corinne lives within her own means, she has never taken a dime from her husband unless it was for the kids. Legally, they are her step children and for Corinne, losing them was like losing an arm.

When Lou found out they were getting a divorce she was shocked to the core. Corinne told her that they were out at the last social dinner of the season and on their way home he very candidly told her he is getting divorced and she has no say. That he will be taking his kids and moving out tomorrow. It took Lou hours to calm Corinne down in the morning without the kids.

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She went by the school to check on them after school the next day and there was a driver there with some stranger to pick them up. The kids ran to her and cried, it took all of Lou’s energy to get Corinne to let go and before they did Corinne told the oldest one to call her as often as he needs to. She will always answer the phone for him no matter what meeting she was in. They hugged one more time and Lou and Corinne drove back to her now empty house.

This afternoon they are driving that same drive home, together. Lou’s car is dead and Corinne has been picking her up to drive her to and from work every day, but right now it’s the middle of the morning and Corinne called her and said she has to get home fast and that she insisted that Lou come with her. Lou knows that Corinne is feeling something strong that is pulling her out of her day so she will not say no. But she is also quiet in the car because she is not sure what will be there waiting for them.

When they are almost back at the house, the only thing Corinne got from the marriage, Lou finally speaks up, “Do you think it’s the kids?” she asks Corinne.

“Oh, I hope not, that would mean they aren’t in school or worse; that he is out of town and left them. No, I think the house itself is calling me. Now I know you’ve been with me long enough to know how nutty I can be, so this would be no surprise to you for me to say that out loud.” Corinne’s voice is quivering though.

“Yes, I have, but Corinne, I’ve never seen you this torn and shaken though. Do you think your ex is at the house? Could this be about him?” Lou asks.

“I thought about that, but he hates the house, he was happy to give it to me remember? He never really wanted to live in that particular house, there is something unsettled there; I’ve said that from day one.

The house is hurting, it’s the craziest thing I’ve ever said, but I stand by what I feel you know that. Ever since we moved in, the guest room has been holding on to an aura that won’t go away. Do you know that my ex would never walk in the room? He even used to say it was off limits to the kids. When I asked him why he said something stupid about ‘my house, my kids, my rules’” Corinne says in a soft voice remembering how much it hurt when he said ‘my kids’, the rest didn’t matter.

She knows the kids are his from his first wife, she thought she was doing a good job raising them to be good children and polite citizens. Corinne made no pretense about their mother, she knew all along she was only a step mother, but in the last six months before the divorce, her husband mentioned that point over and over again. How he never really wanted a mother for his kids, he wanted a wife.

Devon was always about appearances, she knew that and she would always make sure that the kids were in clean, fresh clothes that fit well, nothing too small or too big. Their hair was always trimmed nicely and she made sure they showered as often as necessary. They used to all do their homework together, she on her laptop and they on the same table with their books out. It worked best this way, they always saw that even adults have responsibility to work after work. The kids respected this.

The oldest is now ten, then eight, then five. When she married Devon they were, five, three and not even one. Corinne is the only mother they remember. Devon used to show them



pictures of their “real” mother and he never let them forget that Corinne was his second choice but the kids loved her and she knew that was real, not manufactured feelings.

“It’s the guest room Lou, I’m sure now.” Corinne says.

“Ok, but it’s kind of creepy this time Corinne, I’m not going to lie.” Lou tells her friend.

“I know, I think that’s why I’m so shaken. Nothing like this has ever happened before.

Usually it’s a gut feeling and I work around the idea or figure out and solve what has been presented to me, God Lou that’s what I get paid for, to analyze something and make it right. But this is a big one. Are you ready?” Corinne asks.

“No, but let’s move on, we’re only two blocks away. We’ll know soon.” Lou says with trepidation.

The women drive the rest of the way in nervous silence. As they pull into the driveway and up to the house, all looks good. “Might as well bring in my bags from this morning. I went over to the discount shopping center because they were opening early today and they were having a great linen sale. I bought the best ones I could find and I plan on putting them in the second bedroom where the boys used to live. In case they ever need a place to come back to.” Corinne says somberly.

“Corinne, don’t go there.” Lou says.

“I know they will be with me, I do Lou, I don’t know when, but you have to trust me on this one. The divorce meeting was not normal. Devon has not been normal in the three years since we bought this house. Ever since he made himself big with those investments of his, he has had a total personality change and this is the thing that makes me most nervous. It was in my letter to the judge.” Corinne responds to Lou while getting out of the car and grabbing the bags.

“Corinne, I believe you but this is even more dangerous than where you have gone before. You’re playing with people’s lives here.” Lou says following her up the steps.

Corinne turns to her friend, “Lou, I’m not playing with anything. I’m preparing for something I think will happen, like I always do, it happens to be with people I love this time. I can’t help that. Carmine believes me.” She says as she unlocks the door and walks in

“Carmine would....”

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH” a male voice howls in pain.

The women look up in time to see someone’s leg fall through the ceiling. Not only is there a leg hanging down but there is a tremendous amount of blood falling from the leg as well.

“Oh my god!! Lou we are actually in time! Quick go grab the step ladder in the dining room.” Corinne turns to her friend who is nowhere to be seen. “Oh crap, Lou faints with blood.” She says to herself out loud.

Corinne runs to the dining room where she had been painting the crown moldings last night. She grabs a pair of scissors as well. By the time she gets back there is a large pool of blood on the floor under the leg, he must have scraped it against something really sharp. With ladder and scissors in hand, Corinne gets under the leg, places the ladder down and grabs a package with the sheets in it and climbs up.

“Sir if you can hear me bang on the floor once.” She waits
He thumps the floor twice.



“Ok, I’m the owner of the place, I am going to cut your pants leg off to see the damage and try and stop the bleeding before I call for emergency help. If you are in pain bang twice again.” She waits

He bangs the floor only once. “That’s not good, it means he hit a nerve and can’t feel the pain I know he must be in.” She whispers to herself. Working as quickly as she can, Corinne cuts the man’s pants off and it reveals a large gouge in his leg, he is going to need many, many stitches on this opening. Working with quick hands she rips open the sheet and tears strips out of it with the scissors. She ties the first one around his thigh where she knows there to be a pressure point. Then she proceeds to tear more and tie more. Once the leg is fully covered in strips of linen, she feels she can make the call for emergency help.

“Emergency, how can we help you?” says a dispatcher

“Hello, my name is Corinne, I live at 654 Maple on the east side of Treasure Park. I walked in my front door when a man’s leg fell through my ceiling. I believe he is one of the contractor’s workers. His leg has been severely gouged by something sharp in the ceiling. Please send fire and rescue along with someone who can get him out of this hole. I’m going to call the contractor too.” Corinne’s voice is shaking now that she realizes what is going on.

“Is the man awake?” the dispatcher asks.

“Sir, knock once if you can still hear me.” Corinne waits. “he is not answering now. He indicated before that he was not in pain, I’m afraid he hit something major in his leg, I’ve wrapped him up in strips made from a bed sheet, it’s saturated again but it seems to have slowed down, there is a lot of blood loss here. Please hurry.”

“Help is on the way, they indicated it should be a little more than five minutes.” The dispatcher announces on the phone.

“Ok, I’ll stay with him. The door is still open, they should come right in.” Corinne hangs up the phone and puts it in her pocket then she looks back up at the hole where the man came through. She looks and looks until she sees what she knew would be there. Her hands start to shake, her heart is pounding and a feeling of dread has overcome her like never before.

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Corinne’s mind goes back to the day she and her husband bought the house. It had only been a few months after Devon and his silent partner made a big financial deal that he announced he wanted to show her a house he had heard was about to go on the market. One they will be able to get for a steal.

They drove up to the house and Corinne had fallen in love with it immediately. The house greeted her well and she knew, walking around, that it would serve them well. A four-bedroom home was more than enough for them. The master bedroom would be hers and Devon’s, the second bedroom would go to the boys and the third to the baby. The fourth, they could keep as a guest room.

They did not meet the owners until the day of the closing. Corinne remembers that day well. She started out by asking if everyone was ok with her recording the event. She explained how she wants to make sure there are no misunderstandings and that it is important to her to record big events in her life. Only the seller’s husband looked at Devon with a suspicious look, Devon said to



the seller, “No worries my friend, she records everything and keeps a bunch of mini tapes stockpiled in a drawer, I’m sure she will never listen to it, or possibly even record over it one day soon.”

Corinne had thought it weird that he felt she would toss her recording away. She knew that Devon thought all her recordings were weird but he never actually announced it before. She keeps two copies actually, one at home and one in a safe deposit box at the bank. Each one marked with a date and event. In the past she has only had to use them once or twice but when she did, it made all the difference.

The woman had looked sad, she remembers. “It’s hard to sell such a beautiful house.” Corinne had told her.

The woman cried and said, “Ever since my son died six months ago, I can’t live there anymore. Imagine finding your son’s dead body in his room.” She had grabbed a few tissues.

“The bedroom by the front of the house?” Corinne had asked.

“Why yes, you must feel it too. You’re a sensitive soul and that is exactly what the house needs. I’m so happy to be selling to you. I’m sure with your sensitive touch, my son’s restlessness will move on. No worries.” She had told her.

“I’m not worried, thank you for telling me though.” Corinne responded.

“Let’s get on with this shall we?” the seller’s husband said abruptly.

“Yes, I’m sorry dear. I just...” his wife began again. He reluctantly put his hand on hers and the lawyer proceeded to conduct the finalizing of the paperwork with robot like precision. Corinne remembers not liking him. He made the room feel small for some reason. As soon as all the papers were signed Devon shook the sellers and the lawyer’s hands but the lawyer did not shake the seller’s hand, in fact, Corinne remembers the lawyer looking at him square in the face and saying, “We’re done.” She will have to check the tape again but she is sure she had not stopped the recording yet.

Devon could not walk out of there fast enough he had told her it was because he wanted to make sure to be at the house when the movers got there. Lou was watching the kids. Remembering where she is, Corinne shakes herself out of her stupor. The sirens are here, she looks out the door and sees two police cars, an ambulance and a firetruck all pulling, into her driveway at the same time. “Sir, rescue team is here, knock again if you can hear me.”

No answer.

The first officer walks in and he looks down and then up at her and Corinne sees something in his eyes. He looks up at the ceiling. ‘He has been here before.’ Corinne thinks to herself. ‘the murder, he was here, this is déjà vu for him’

He steps aside and lets the EMTs in. “Go upstairs and to the right, it’s the first door, right away but he is not answering me now, I’m not sure he is conscious any more. But he is alive, I can feel a pulse at his ankle. You’re going to have to open this ceiling more to get him out.” She calls to them.

The firemen walk over to assess the situation. “Maám, I’m afraid we may have to make more damage.” He tells her flatly.

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“No kidding, I just said that. You don’t want to pull him back up because whatever sliced him will do the same thing all over again. Please break the ceiling on the other side of his leg here near the front of him, pull him forward then up. It’s the safest way for him.” She tells him.

The fireman looks at her and studies the situation again. “Mind if I climb up?” he asks. Corinne, for the first time, gets down from the ladder, but not before she rests the leg on a rung of the ladder so it’s not dangling.

The fireman looks at the ceiling and looks down at Corinne, “I believe you have this situation well in hand maám. The wound looks well attended to and you’re right about getting him out of here. We’ll go upstairs and check with the EMTs before we begin any demolition.” He says as he climbs back down.

Something twinkles at the top of the ladder, Corinne climbs up again and gasps. “You all right miss?” asks the police officer.

‘Oh no, not here, not him, not them! Oh no, what have you done? Carmine you’ve always said we are connected. You’ve always told me I married the wrong man, even when I was married to Devon. I do love you Carmine, you’re my best friend in the whole world, if you can hear me calling you, please show up. Today is a good day to show up.’ Corinne’s tears begin to fall, what she has seen hiding in the above floor boards will shake her whole world, she is sure of this now.

This is going to be more than a feeling, this is bad. Lou was right about that. “Miss, do you need help getting down?” The officer calls to her again as he steps closer to the ladder.

Corinne looks down at the officer, then around the room, no one else is there. “You’ve been here before, haven’t you?” she asks.

The officer looks up at her and does not want to answer. He is not supposed to say where he has been or when. There is something about her question though that pulls him to say, “Yes.” In a quiet voice.

“Answer one question, was the case solved?” she asks. He shakes his head no.

“Whomever worked on the case before, if it was you or someone else, you may want to call them now. I think the murder weapon is what cut this man’s leg, taped under this floorboard.” She says as calmly as possible.

Before he can respond the firemen come back into the foyer, “Miss, I’m afraid I have to ask you to get down from there. The EMTs have him stabilized now and we have to break the ceiling like you said. At this point, they want to assess the wound and get him on his way to the hospital.”

Corinne steps down slowly, the officer stands behind her and helps her down, he can feel her shaking. He looks up and sees the shining object the same way she did. “I’ll make that call” he whispers into her ear as she takes the last step off.

One fireman gets upon the ladder and holds the man’s leg steady. Two others bring in another ladder and start banging against the ceiling to break it open more. Lucky for them the beams are far enough apart that they don’t have to cut any of them to help the man out.

Once he has been pulled through to the upstairs the EMTs rush to put him on a stretcher and bring him down. As they come down the stairs, the man is on his stomach, an IV is in his arm and he is semi-conscious. Corinne watches as they roll him by.



“Miss, that’s some fancy first aid work, we aren’t going to open the wrappings until we get to the hospital, he has lost a lot of blood and there is no reason to open the wrapping here. I’m sorry about the ceiling.” He says to her.

All she could do is shake her head. “Will he be ok?” she asks.

“Not sure how he is going to get back to work for a long time, by the looks of things, because of you though, he will live to tell the tale. Let’s go men.” The EMT says.

Corinne watches as they leave, the lead fireman approaches her. “That is some nice job you did. I must say you’ve kept a very clear head on you this whole time. Is there someone you’d like me to call to come over, I believe the whole situation will hit you once things are calm and I recommend you not be alone, if possible,” he smiles at her, clearly very impressed.

“I’m ok, it’s very nice of you to offer.” Corinne was going to tell him more but behind her she hears someone calling her.

“Corinne!! Oh, thank god it’s not you. I came through the back way.” Carmine calls to her and reaches her to pull her into his arms, she melts right into him easily. “On my way over, Lou called, she walked home, you know how she is with blood.” He whispers in her ear and Corinne shakes her head yes.

“Thank you gentlemen, for your quick response.” He reaches out to shake the fireman’s hand, it is received with a smile.

“I leave you in good hands then, I see Officer Abraham is sticking around as well. Good day.” He tips his hat and heads out the door.

Corinne lifts her head to look at Carmine in the eyes. “Yes, I heard you. You called me, didn’t you? That’s why I was heading over here in the first place,” he asks in a whisper so the officer wouldn’t hear him. Corinne can only shake her head in the affirmative.

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Carmine walks Corinne over to the dining room table to sit down. “I’ll get some lemonade for everyone. Officer?” he calls.

“That would be appreciated, thank you.” He says as he walks over to Corinne. He sits next to her and says, “You know something?” he asks.

“I do now.” She answers. “I know more than I want to, and more than I should. Carmine!!” she yells.

Carmine runs into the dining room. “The kids Carmine, we have to get the kids. Things are going to hit the fan big time, really soon, and possibly today. Do something, call that judge friend of yours the one who did the divorce. Carmine, you HAVE to.” Tears are running down her face now.

The officer goes to the door to greet the lieutenant who has shown up. He is the lead investigator of the homicide that took place in this house three and half years ago. He leads him to the hole in the ceiling and shines a flashlight on the beam in question. Then he takes him over to introduce him to Corinne.

However, Corinne is inconsolable right now and he decides to wait. Carmine holds her and then holds her tightly into him. He never liked Devon, he knew he was wrong for Corinne. He knew he didn’t appreciate the gift she has and the beauty that is her and his own children.



Carmine asked Corinne to leave Devon three years ago when things began to change. Shortly after his financial windfall. He saw something dark about him, but she stayed for the kids. Carmine knows that but it has hurt him every day. Ever since he met her, Carmine has been head over heels in love with her. Now things were starting to swing his way but with this snafu that opened up he is not sure what will happen. "I'm going to call Lou, then I'll call the judge." He whispers to her ear. She shakes her head.

'Not the belt too, not the belt' she thinks to herself. She knew they knew each other, she knew it, she could feel it, but for this? This is how they knew each other?' Corinne thinks then runs to the nearest bathroom and begins to vomit viciously.

Lou finds her in the bathroom. "Sorry about bailing on you but I would not have been of any help to you. Hate me?" she asks softly.

Corinne looks up at her oldest and dearest friend, she looks into her eyes, "The belt" is all she has to say.

Lou looks at her with frightened eyes then looks out of the bathroom and back at Corinne, she puts her hand over her mouth. "no" is all she can say and even that was barely audible. Corinne shakes her head yes slowly.

Both women are shaking now. The knock on the door startles them both, "You guys ok?" Carmine calls in to them.

Lou opens the door slowly because she does not know where anyone is standing and the guest bathroom is small. "Hey, Corinne the police officer needs you now my dear. Let me help you out." He reaches for her and she lets him help her up.

"The kids." She whispers out.

"I called the judge, he said he will have the paperwork done before they pick Devon up. He was not happy to hear this, says its unprecedented but without any other known family he can only give you temporary custody and that you could lose them to anyone who claims to be biological family. Including the mother's parents." He pushes her hair behind her ears and looks into her eyes. For the first time since he has known her, Corinne's eyes are colorless, the stress has wiped out all the glow from her in so little time. Carmine is worried. He takes her hand and leads her out of the bathroom, Lou follows slowly.

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Corinne sits down in the living room on the chair she bought herself, the most comfortable chair in the house, she sits here when she needs to gather her thoughts, sometimes it takes a moment, and other times it takes hours. She can get lost in thought here, but she can't now, she has to think about all that she knows. The timeline fits, she decides and her hands begin to shake again.

Carmine is sitting on the floor at her feet, now reaching up to hold her shaking hands. Corinne looks down at him lovingly. This man, whom she met three years ago upon moving into this house, has been her best friend, confidant and as of late, maybe even more in her heart. He has said, for the longest time that they are connected, he heard her call him today, this she is certain of. They truly are connected, he will help her through all of this. She lifts her head to look at the police officers sitting in front of her on the couch and she sees Lou sitting in her favorite

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spot, the purple loveseat her husband, ex-husband, hated from the moment she bought it. Corinne smiles at Lou and she receives a wide smile back of encouragement.

Corinne takes a deep breath. “My name is Corinne, I was married to Devon Manchester for five years, three of which we lived here in this house. The two years before that we lived over on Diamond Street in a condo. I was not particularly looking for a house, my husband had come home one day to tell me he found the perfect place for us and that we can get it straight from the owner before they list it with an agent. That is the simplest part of the story.

This may take a while, so if you’re hungry or thirsty maybe we should serve you something first?” Corinne asks.

“No, the lemonade was enough, this is an old case that we would love to solve sooner than later and by the looks of things and your reaction to what you’ve seen I believe you will have the answers that we need. Am I right?” Officer Abraham asks.

Corinne squeezes Carmine’s hands in her own and he squeezes her back to give her the strength she needs. “The best way I know how to tell you is to tell you a story. Lou, please go get my recorder, I only want to say this once.” Corinne sits back and waits for Lou to find her recorder in her desk and place it on the coffee table in front of her.

“If you can reserve your questions for when I’m done, I’m sure you will get everything you need from this story though.” Corinne says first.

“Ok, we’ll wait. Thank you for recording this, it will be a big help to us, like you said, we won’t have to come back multiple times to ask the same questions over and over. Please take your time. We’ve waited three years already, a couple more hours won’t change things.” He tries to smile at her to put her at ease.

Officer Abraham catches Lou watching him and he smiles at her too. She is ruffling his feathers and he needs to focus on the woman in front of him, not the one to the side, no matter how beautiful those eyes are.

Corinne looks at Carmine again, “You’ve got this. Think of the kids.” He whispers. She shakes her head. “Four years ago, on our first anniversary I bought my husband what I thought would be the best present ever. I went to the belt maker two towns over. His name is Rene and he is a silversmith from France, he does unique work, no two are alike except in shape because they are belt buckles. He also has a partner who is a master at leather. So together they have made a business that will never go away unless all men stop wearing pants.” Corinne smiles a moment, so does Lou. They’ve always had the same silly sense of humor.

“Anyway, what better first anniversary gift? Rene designed and worked on this for weeks. He had it finished two days before our anniversary and it was so stunning I jumped up and gave him a hug and kiss right there in the store. They wrapped it up in a velvet box that is almost as beautiful as the piece itself.

Devon and I found a babysitter in the condo complex who could come over for a couple hours so we could go out to dinner. This dinner was a really big deal to us, it was a splurge for us, while I make decent money on my own, I don’t regularly go to places like The Plaza on any amount of regularity. Devon and I had a wonderful time, we danced, we ate and we even laughed.

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After our dinner and before our dessert I gave him the belt I had made for him. He was blown away, so much so, he showed it off to the tables nearest to us to great appraisals.

Before dessert came he excused himself and went to the bathroom to exchange the belt he had on for the new one I had bought him. I was so happy I cried. Ok, it doesn’t take much to get me to cry but that was such a beautiful sentiment on his part, don’t you think?” she looks at Carmine and he smirks at her. She squeezes his hands again. His strength is what is getting her through this.

“He wore that belt every day after that for the next few months. One day he told me that he thinks it would be nice if I took the kids to go visit my parents but that he could not get off work because he and his silent partner were working on something big and it’s about to break. So, I called my parents, gave notice that I would be going for a long weekend and got work from school for us to make sure no one fell behind. We had a fantastic trip; my parents live near a county park that has a petting zoo; we all had so much fun.” Corinne takes a breath and puts her hand on her heart. It was such fun to see her parents then. She had no idea it would be the last time, damn black ice.

“Corinne, don’t think of Mom and Dad now you’ll make me cry. Think of the kids.” Lou says to her. Lou knew exactly where Corinne’s head was and she appreciates that. Corinne shakes her head at her friend and continues.

“When we came back after that weekend Devon was away, he had called me the night before about some big business take over that he had to be away for and told me he would be home the following night. I accepted this because I knew he was working on something important, it had consumed him for the weeks before.

But he came home to three sick kids and I was so busy with the kids and my own work, we didn’t talk much for a few days. Finally, when I had seen him join us for dinner a few nights later, I noticed he was not wearing his belt. I remember asking him and he had looked genuinely upset about not having it. He blamed it on the hotel he was in, said he came back from the pool and it was gone. My heart was broke that he didn’t press the hotel workers further. Then my heart broke further when he said it was only a belt.

I reminded him it was an anniversary present and he retorted with, ‘doesn’t matter’, he will always remember getting the gift, and that the hotel would call if the belt was found. When I told him to call the pawn shops to make sure someone isn’t trying to get money for the brass, he flat out said no. In fact, he told me, hmmm what were the words? Oh yes, “It’s just a damn buckle, get over it Corinne I have bigger things to deal with and so should you. You do still have a job, don’t you?” and he had walked away right after that.

Another two weeks passed and no word from the hotel, when I had asked once more he became quite angry at me at the time, he nearly swung his hand to my face. I remember this clearly because he had never done anything else like that before. He stormed out of the room and left for the rest of the day.

The date? Yes, I remember that weekend well, it was March 6th. It’s one of the last weekends I spent with my folks so I remember the date well. They have since passed. Thank you. Lou, where was I?” Corinne asks her friend.

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“Devon the devil had taken a swing at you.” Lou says with irritation in her voice, she remembers the whole incident well. Too well.

“Right, after that Devon buried himself into his work and this really big deal he had been working on. By the end of that week he had come home yelling as he opened the door one night, “Corinne!” he called to me, “We did it!! The whole thing, it’s ours!”

I did not know what he was referring to but he was happy and that was what I had been waiting for, for a long time. I remember running to him and he lifted me up and planted a very big kiss on my lips and tipped me over just like a movie scene.

The kids had come running too and he picked them all up and announced we were going to dinner. We went out as a family, it was beautiful. Or so you’d think. But something was clouding Devon’s aura. I could sense something dark. Something was not quite right. Ever since then, he has been off in some way shape or form.

Shortly after that night, this windfall came to him and Devon came home to tell me about this house he had found and told me how perfect it was for us.

I’ll jump now to the day we closed on the house.” Corinne stood up and told them the whole story of the closing, how she felt uneasy about the seller’s husband, how Devon and the seller’s husband had made eye contact more than once.

She then told them how after moving in, he would never walk into that fourth bedroom. At this point the shaking begins again and Corinne sits back down in her chair.

“Do we need to do this all in one day?” Carmine asks the officers.

“There’s more?” Officer Abraham asks as he looks from Corinne to Carmine and to Lou. Lou responds with, “His behavior after moving here became erratic. His mood swings all depended on whether or not Corinne was talking about decorating the dining room or the bedrooms. I was here once when she mentioned that she feels the guest room wants to be painted and he jumped down her throat with statements like the guests can suck it up and deal with the color it is and stop saying stupid things like the house ‘wants’ something. It makes you sound like a bimbo. I’ll never forget that day, never.” Lou’s voice is now quivering at the memory.

“Please officers, take the evidence out of the house and come back tomorrow, we will talk with you then. But these women need some time to recover from today and we need to clean up the floor in the front before the kids come home.” Carmine’s voice is a bit more assertive now trying to emphasize the importance of leaving.

The lieutenant speaks for the first time. “Ms. Corinne, I’m sorry to put you through this. I’m sure this is a living hell for you. If you don’t mind, I’d like to take the recording so we can have it typed up down at the precinct. I will call you tomorrow but not before 10:00am ok?” he asks.

Corinne has no strength to think right now, she wants to see the kids; that is all that is in her mind now. She looks to Carmine with questioning eyes.

“Will you be picking Devon up today? If so, here is his business card and address. I received a message from Judge Mantis that temporary custody has been given to Corinne starting today after school. What should I do?” Carmine asks.

“Let me make a call.” The lieutenant says, he pulls out his phone and walks into the other room speaking softly and quickly on the phone.



Lou looks over at Corinne holding Carmine and the thought of Corinne finally being happy makes her smile, at least on the inside. She is so focused she hardly notices that Officer Abraham has approached her. “Excuse me Ms. But are *you* ok?” he asks softly.

Lou looks up at the officer who is now standing over her, she moves over so he can sit down next to her. “I’m ok. I’m happy you haven’t said anything about not believing her feelings. So many people don’t understand she gets a feeling and she has to act immediately. That’s why we even found the man as he fell through. She called me at work and told me the house needs her now, so I came home with her right away. I know to trust her word. You can too.” She says all the while looking directly into his eyes.

“Down at the precinct we call them hunches, we almost always follow them. But this one led us to evidence and she saved a man’s life. If she wasn’t here until later today he would have died for sure and the mess would be much bigger. Whomever left it here would have been charged with accidental homicide.” He responds trying to sound professional but her eyes are pulling him in and he really wants to make sure she is ok.

The lieutenant comes back into the room, “Ms. Corinne is there someplace you can stay for at least tonight with the kids? My sergeant wants us to comb the place for other evidence. It can take hours and I’m afraid that would be much later than when kids get home or even go to bed.” He looks directly at Corinne.

She is comforted by his eyes, she knows he will do the right thing with this case. He will help the poor boy who was murdered and put the house at ease. He believes her, she can always tell who does and who doesn’t.

“The kids have stayed with me before, come to me Corinne we’ll bake biscuits tonight with the kids, and let them have ice cream for dessert.” Lou smiles at her friend. She knows Carmine wants them by him but she also knows, it’s not a good idea, not now if Corinne thinks she can get the kids back.

“I’ll stay in the office here tonight Corinne, we don’t want to leave an injured house alone do we.” Carmine says. Corinne looks at him in the eye and realizes he has now told her how much he cares about her and about all her silly feelings, that he believes her and that he understands her. Yes Carmine, you will be around a long, long time, she thinks to herself. She hugs him tightly, “Thank you.” She whispers

“Very well then we won’t need to ask for a key. Here is my card, if anything comes to mind and you want to write it down instead of speaking to us tomorrow, my e-mail is on there too. I’m available twenty-four hours a day for these kinds of situations, so even if you need to talk in the middle of the night, feel free to call.” The Lieutenant hands her the card and signals to Officer Abraham to follow him out of the room. Abraham stands to go but drops one of his cards on the loveseat next to Lou, “anytime you need to talk.” He smiles and walks to the lieutenant, before he walks out of the room he looks back at Lou, she is still watching him and he smiles again.

~ ~ ~

The lieutenant shows the officer his phone, “This is going to be all over the papers, look who her ex is and the previous owner of the house.”

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Officer Abraham looks down, "No way we can keep this quiet? The kids man, we have to think of the kids." He pleads with the lieutenant.

"If we find either of their fingerprints it will be a slam dunk on them. The timeline works as she said and she has proof she was away; the question is, can he produce hotel receipts that he was away? I doubt it, these guys are too blinded by the next big coup to think about details. I'm betting there are prints on both the knife and the belt. The young man was strangled, that much we know, now all we need is some skin on that belt and we got them both. Now the chip we found in his stomach will make more sense, there was a second one in his intestines."

"Gross." Officer Abraham says.

"Yeah but he was obviously trying to tell us something, now we at least know where to check, the numbers we found could be accounts overseas or something. We'll catch the bastards for sure, that much I am certain of now. Do we know how the poor worker is?" he asks.

"No word yet, I'm assuming it was going to take a long time to stitch him up, it was one hell of an injury there." Officer Abraham says as they observe the hole again waiting for the forensics team to show up.

"Come on Corinne, you know you can't go to Carmine's place. Not if you want the kids." Lou says the obvious but she knows it needs to be said

"Yes, I know. Did the judge say I can pick them up? How does this work?" she asks Carmine.

"The message was that the kids should go directly to you after school. I suppose we should show up early and get them before their driver comes to get them, in case they have not picked up Devon yet. Lou do you want to come too since they will be all going to you?" Carmine asks.

"Sure, I'll drive. No offense Carmine, but your driving sucks." Lou says.

"None taken, I agree. I only drive when necessary. You know what. Actually, why don't you two go; I don't want to leave the house just yet." He says.

"You feel something too?" Corinne asks.

"I feel something and that is telling me to stay. Mad?" he asks.

"Relieved." Corinne answers.

~ ~ ~

Corinne and Lou walk into the school office with only a printout of the order from the judge, it's not sealed and notarized so she is hoping that they take their word as true. Lou holds on to Corinne for a moment before they go in. "Ready?"

"As much as I can, let's go in before I lose my nerve." She says.

The two women walk to the office of the school building and ask to speak to the principal on an urgent matter. He walks out and greets them smiling. "Come in Corinne. I'm happy to see you again." He walks them into his office and closes the door. "Hold all calls please" he calls to his secretary.

"Now, what can be so urgent that you need to bring reinforcements? I know the divorce is final and that your ex has the kids. I'm sorry you have no visitation and I understand that you were actually a step parent. I know it's hard but I can't go above the law so don't ask me to discuss how



the kids are doing, I’m not allowed to say that either.” He finishes and sits back with his arms crossed waiting for the women to respond.

Lou quickly shows him the printout they have of the custody order, “We’d like to take the kids now please, before their driver shows up. As we understand, at some point this afternoon, Devon will be arrested for, well I suppose I’m not allowed to say why, but he will be, and that is why we already have the custody order directly from the judge. Can you please call the children down? If you don’t believe us, do not call Devon, please call this number at the precinct.” Lou hands him Officer Abraham’s card.

Disgusted with being given an ultimatum, he says, “I think I’ll do just that.” In a voice too annoyed to hide.

Corinne sits frozen in her chair unable to speak for fear she will cry, she wants the kids so much it has been eating her up every day she speaks to them.

They watch as the principal’s face goes from aggravated to nervous. “Yes, officer I can make sure that happens right away. Thank you for clarifying everything for me. I’m sure you understand I was only trying to uphold what I knew. Yes sir, no assistance will be necessary.” The principal sits back in his chair shaking his head and trying to compose himself. ‘Murder?’

“Mrs. Appleton please go and collect the Manchester children and bring them here with their book bags.” He says over the intercom to his secretary.

“Yes sir, right away.” She fumbles out of her chair and races to get the children. Corinne didn’t look good and that only means one thing. Corinne has a bad feeling and Candice Appleton knows to trust Corinne’s gut. She has been the recipient of Corinne’s saving before, now it must be time to save the kids from something, or someone. She begins to walk faster as her imagination runs wild.

Corinne and Lou watch the principal for any indication that he knows the real reason Devon’s driver is not coming. Finally, after ten minutes of silence, he sits up and says, “Whatever you need us to do, please let us know. We are behind you 100% Corinne, we know who really loves those kids and everyone here will back you up, myself included. You’ll see.”

“Mom? What are you doing here?” the oldest boy asks.

Corinne quickly turns around and smiles at her children. “We have special permission to have a big sleepover at Loulou’s house. How does that sound to you guys? We’re going shopping first for some new clothes and then home to bake biscuits and have ice cream.” She says with as much charm as she can.

The little girl looks from her mother to Loulou. “I don’t like biscuits, do I?” she asks. The bit of laughter this brings takes Corinne back to being a mom and in her happiest mood since they left. “Come, thank you Principal Jackson.” Corinne says as she and Lou walk out with the kids.

The shopping spree is because she is not sure when she can get over to their father’s house and get their clothes and other belongings. They talk about their day, school and everything else a normal family would talk about after school.

Lou watches Corinne with the kids and her heart swells. If anyone was meant to be a mother, it’s Corinne. Lou carries the little girl throughout the store because she is too tired at this point of the day. Once back in the car, she immediately falls asleep on her brother’s lap.



The kids all run into Lou’s house, they’ve been here before and they all know where she keeps the good snacks so they go there first. “Wash your hands before you eat anything!” she hears herself call to them. Corinne looks at her friend, “Hmmm, rubbing off, am I?” and the two of them laugh but only for a moment, this is a very bittersweet afternoon.

~ ~ ~

Carmine busies himself in the office trying to get work done but the distraction of the forensics team roaming around the house is making this very hard. He knows the kids are safe at Lou’s house, for tonight anyway. So why is he so jumpy? What could be making him so nervous? He checks his watch, time is moving so slowly.

He checks his e-mail, nothing pressing has come in from work or personal and he even finished his presentation for tomorrow somehow. He paces the office a few more times.

He is interrupted by screaming, “Where are they bitch!!! I know you took my kids, where are they?!! You think you can pull your little, ooo I have a bad feeling crap just to get them back to this place?!!! Get out here before I call the cops!!!!” Devon screams even louder now. Sounding like a madman.

Within seconds, Carmine emerges from the office and Devon’s eyes are boring right into him. “What have you done with my kids, you sorry excuse for a man? What are you doing in my house in the first place, I thought I banned you from coming in.” Devon’s voice is at a point of bellowing now. The officers are watching him from behind a door to see what he says and does, their recorders are on. Carmine sees them so he decides to approach Devon a couple of steps knowing he won’t get hurt.

“First of all, Devon, this is not your house anymore remember? You gave it away in your divorce settlement.” He says calmly.

“Seriously? You believe that? No judge actually gives away a man’s house to a woman. I let her live here because I’m not as heartless as you may think. She said she wanted the house in lieu of alimony. So, I still pay the mortgage, same deal.” He smiles devilishly at Carmine thinking he has the upper hand.

“No, you don’t, ask your accountant. If he is telling you to sign mortgage checks, it must be for his own house. This one belongs to Corinne. I’ve seen the papers that prove ownership. Why are *you* here Devon? I thought you’d never show your face back in this, how did you call it on divorce day? Ah yes, this hell hole of a building.” Carmine smirks at him.

“I’m here to pick up my kids. My driver called and said he was told the kids were picked up already, he asked if they were with me. Like that would ever happen. What am I supposed to do with kids at work?” Devon challenges Carmine.

“You could have surprised them and taken them out for ice cream or something like that. Kids like spending time their fathers, you know?” Carmine says.

Devon lifts his head back and laughs, he does it a few times before he suddenly stops with his head facing up. He is right under the hole in the ceiling.

“Problem Devon?” Carmine asks.



“What are you doing to my house?” he asks, only this time his voice is much softer and a wee bit shaky.

Carmine answers with a sneer, “Again, not your house.”

Devon tears his eyes away from the hole and looks around, for the first time since walking in he sees the blood on the floor, he is standing in it and he jumps back, in fact he quickly jumps out of the blood and pulls his shoes off to throw them across the room.

Standing in his stocking feet and breathing quickly Devon is taking in the rest of the room. There is police tape over the hole and as he looks around more he sees five police officers around the room. As he catches the eye of Officer Abraham, the officer walks forward, he pulls something out of bag and asks, “Look familiar?” as he shows Devon the belt in a clear evidence bag.

Devon crumbles to his knees on the floor. He tries to gain his strength, to yell, to say the right thing, to defend himself in something that should not have happened but did. All these years of running from that fateful night, all the lies he told, the people he paid off, it all comes back to haunt him because his wife had a bad feeling. Ex-wife, he has to remind himself.

“I’m sorry Belinda.” He whispers.

“Who?” Officer Abraham asks.

“His first wife, the kid’s biological mother, she died after the youngest was born.” Carmine tells the officer.

“Pick him up boys and bring him to the 15th precinct.” The officer gives the orders to two men standing near him.

Carmine watches as they read him his rights, tell him the charges and walk, no not really walking, Devon is being dragged out. The fight has gone out of him. Maybe he is relieved, Carmine thinks to himself.

Officer Abraham walks over to Carmine, “He is defeated. I’ve seen that look before.”

“Yeah, all his gusto drained in a matter of seconds once he saw the hole. Corinne is going to be crushed. She wanted to be wrong. She wanted the belt to be stolen and used by someone else. She wanted the kids to not have both parents taken away. Greed is a terrible thing.” Carmine says.

“What makes you think of greed?” the officer asks.

“It all happened around the time of his big financial gain remember?” Carmine scratches the back of his neck, he looks back up at the hole and for the first time all day he walks upstairs to see the room, now a police investigation room.

Carmine walks in and sits down on the floor, he puts his hands on the floor and tries to feel things like Corinne does. The room feels calm, in a strange way the room feels calm. His own nerves have subsided as well. Maybe he was supposed to be here to greet Devon. “Rest in peace whomever you were.” He says out loud to the man who died here.

~ ~ ~

“Hello?” Corinne answers her phone quietly because the kids are nearby.

“Hello, Ms. Corinne?” a man’s voice asks.

“Yes, this is her.” she answers.



“I’m Officer Yardly from the 15th precinct. Your ex-husband has been brought in, while he has already called his lawyer, he asked if he could call you too. Do you want to speak to him?”

“Um, ok for a moment.” She says nervously.

“Beam number eighteen, I mentioned during the divorce, listen to the recording. I pretty much admitted I knew where the belt was then. You looked at me questioningly I remember. You knew something was wrong all along. I’m a fool to think you wouldn’t have. Corinne take care of our kids, they are yours. I’ll sign whatever papers I need to. Belinda would have wanted them to be deeply loved, her folks are gone and her sister is not fit, she won’t contest anything. My family, as you know already, doesn’t do kids well.”

“Ok, you take care of yourself,” she says.

Before she can hang up, Devon says, “One more thing, please.”

“Yes,” Corinne says softly again.

“Marry him Corinne, he loves you, he knows you and he will take care of my kids. Marry Carmine. I’ll have my lawyers get you some money for the kids’ education.”

“I don’t want your money,” she says harshly, then she calms her tone down, “Thank you for your blessing though.” Corinne hangs up the phone and looks over at Lou.

“I think he will confess before his lawyer even gets there. Oh God Lou, that beautiful belt used for such ugliness. I’d have never imagined. I have to call Carmine and tell him what he said before he rescinds his words.” Corinne says in a hurried voice.

“The kids?” Lou asks.

“Mine,” Corinne answers.

Lou’s tears begin to fall before she can even try and stop them. “Come on kids, time to invade the kitchen for biscuit time!” She gathers everyone up and they race to the kitchen. Corinne calls Carmine and tells him about the call, he in turn tells her what happened when Devon came over and where he is now. Corinne sheds a tear for the man who understands as well as she does that inanimate objects can feel things too. She might marry Carmine, time will tell.

Corinne sits down and sends a quick e-mail to the lieutenant from this morning. *If you can get a copy of my divorce proceedings, you will see that Devon admitted he knew what was in the house. Check, there may be more than one place he slips in that conversation. For one thing he said exactly where the creak was in the floor of that room, down to which number floor beam it was.* Corinne hits send and joins the kids, her kids in the kitchen.
~ ~ ~

Lieutenant Yardly reads his e-mail. He knows Devon is in an interrogation room and he is writing out his confession. Sometimes, there is some relief in getting caught. After speaking with the ex-wife, Lieutenant Yardly thinks the divorce was to get away from the wife who could tell something was wrong more than the wife he didn’t love. He decides to make a few calls to get a copy of the divorce proceedings, he wants this iron clad, no misses, it’s been long enough. A mother needs to know who did this to her son.

Working near the courthouse makes these kinds of requests easier. Within two hours Yardly has the reports he wants. He decides to take them home, his shift is over and today it has been a long one.



Once home he begins to read the report.

Honorable Judge Lincoln presiding

“yeah, yeah, yeah, where is the part where they start to speak, ah, page three. Ok let’s get to it Devon.” He says to no one.

“What do you mean she wrote a letter? If I had to say everything out loud, so does she!!” Devon yelled.

The judge responds with, “If the person in question feels they will be ridiculed for whatever they say, I will allow them to state their wishes in writing. It should have been pointed out to you by your lawyer. Ms. Corinne here took it upon herself to look up what her choices were. As you can see, your wife does not have a lawyer.”

“Yeah, because she believes whatever her mind tells her. So glad the kids aren’t with her, what if her mind told her to kill someone?” Devon asks.

“Council, I’d advise your client to keep his mouth closed while I read this and if he was smart, he will wait until a question is asked before speaking to me again. Remembering I am the one who has the final decision as to whom receives what in these proceedings.” The judge says.

“Devon, you’re not doing yourself any favors, sit still for once in your life. Five minutes isn’t a lifetime.” The counselor says to his client.

Pause while judge is reading - five minutes of empty time on the recording.

“Are you sure Ms? This is all you want?” the judge asks.

“Yes sir, I am sure. I would argue that I’d like to see the kids, but they aren’t mine and I understand that from a legal point of view. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt.” Corinne says.

“Yes, but nothing else?” the judge asks again.

“What does the wacko want?” Devon asks harshly

Judge looks counselor square in the eyes, “One more outburst and the word contempt comes to mind.” he says.

“I’ll ask you a third time, are you sure this is all, you’re not going to regret anything here? You’re not being coerced into saying this one thing?” Judge asks.

“No sir, I work and have a good job, I’ll be ok. Thank you for your concern though.” Corinne says.

“Devon Manchester you are getting away with murder here. Your wife understands her limitations as a step mother and is not contesting custody of the children. She is also not asking for any alimony because she has a secure job of her own. However, based on this copy of your bank account that you purposely or accidentally left on the kitchen table recently, I agree with her that you are more than capable of paying off your mortgage. This is all she asks for. She wants you to pay off the mortgage and turn the house over to her. No more contact with you for anything else is necessary.” The judge pauses.

“Why does she want a broken house?” Devon asks.

“Ahhh, good of you to say that sir. Your wife asks that you state all the reasons out loud why you won’t go into the guest room, attic or parts of the basement. She wants it recorded so that if anyone ever gets hurt by these areas of the house, it isn’t her fault that you never would allow her to fix them.”



“Fix them?! How can you fix them? It’s her that needs to be fixed, she gets these crazy feelings about things and I’m supposed to jump on them? The 18th floorboard creaks in the guest room, so I avoid the room – big deal. I have my own bedroom. The attic has holes in the walls in weird places so I don’t want to get bit by any animal living there and she is making this a liability on me?!” he screams

“Why didn’t you call an exterminator?” the judge asks.

“Because it’s not animals. Doesn’t matter, why are you believing her feelings, is this how you run your court room?” Devon yells again.

“Are you finished sir? What about the basement?” the judge asks.

“You are annoying Corinne, this is so dumb. I don’t like dirt, you know that as well as anyone who knows me does, I don’t like the kids getting dirty so I don’t let them go into the basement, is that so terrible? It’s not finished and there is enough house to play in, they don’t need another room to mess up. Besides there are funny smells down there and the baby has breathing issues. Satisfied Corinne? Have I spoken enough for you? I don’t want your little friends getting boobos, I might get sued for damages of stubbing a toe on those metal caps in the basement. OOOOO I’m scared. Take the house, I don’t want it anyway. Are we finished here?” Devon asks the judge.

Lieutenant Yardly puts the papers down. “What a prick” he says out loud to no one. Then he calls his team back and says to meet him back at the house, they have to check the attic and the basement.

“Hello?” Carmine answers his phone a little groggily

“Hello, it’s Lieutenant Yardly. I’m afraid we are coming back, with some new evidence I believe we have more things to look at in the house. We will all be there within a half an hour.” He hangs up before Carmine can give him an argument.

Bad enough his team is grumbling about this he doesn’t need the home owner against him too. This is bigger than he thought. He has no idea what else he will find in those places. So much can be hidden in holes and under plates. He is not sure it’s evidence of the murder or some other illegal gains. But he is determined to find out.

“Carmine? Are you ok? Do you need me to come over?” Corinne asks in a nervous voice.

“No, Corinne the police called back they don’t want to wait until morning they are coming back to look at the basement and the attic, I wanted you to know. How are the kids? Sleeping, I assume at this hour.” He says calmly.

“Yeah, the baby fell asleep in my lap and I nearly died right there. Lou has been great of course. Officer Abraham has called her twice tonight to check in on her and she isn’t even directly affected by the house or the kids. Hmmmmm, kind of funny don’t you think?” she asks

“I like him Corinne, he is good people, I can tell.” Carmine says.

“You are too.” She says sweetly.

Carmine stops his pacing mid stride, this is the first time she has shown him any affection outwardly. He swallows hard and thinks a moment, “thank you,” is all that comes to mind to say. “Goodnight Corinne, I’ll see you all in the morning. Let’s take the kids to breakfast at Joes, pancakes and eggs, the works,” he says cheerfully.



“Hmm, good idea. Goodnight.” .

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The doorbell rings at 7:30 in the morning, Lou runs to get the door before the kids do. She opens the door to see Officer Abraham standing there with some papers in his hand. “Good morning maám. May I come in?” he asks.

Lou, looks down at herself and realizes she is only half dressed, she opens the door and steps aside so he can come in. One by one the kids come to the front room to see who is at the door. The officer looks at them and says, “Ok, let me guess. You must be Calvin.” He points to the oldest boy in the room.

“Yes sir, I am. Are you a real police officer?”

“Yes, I am. Oh,” he squats down, “You must be the princess they call Nancy.” He stares down as the five-year-old girl hides behind Calvin’s legs.

“She is shy, she is only five years old,” Calvin says proudly.

“Well, in that case, I will step away so she won’t get nervous. And you must be Robbie.” He puts out his hand to shake the eight-year old’s hand.

“Yes, I am, how do you know us? Do we know you?”

“Good question guys. This is Officer Abraham, he is helping out your mom with the house, one of the workers got hurt yesterday in the house. His leg fell through the floor up in the guest room. Can you imagine that?”

“Whoa, is he hurt bad Loulou?” Robbie asks.

“He had to go to the hospital Robbie but he will be ok, won’t he officer?” Lou turns to the officer.

“Yes, by all accounts your mother saved his life.” The says.

“Whoo hoo!!! Way to go mom, saving a life! Wait till the kids at school hear that you did that. It’s so cool.” Calvin says.

“I’m glad you approve of me saving a life Calvin, now before we are all late for breakfast, can you get everyone ready to go, Carmine will be there in ten minutes. Pancakes are only for those kids who brush their teeth and put on clean clothes.” She calls to them as they leave the room

“Are those for me?” Corinne asks as she points to the papers in the officer’s hand.

“Your ex made a full confession last night even before his lawyer showed up. When the lawyer got there, he wanted to protest the confession but Devon said whatever he wrote is the truth. The lawyer was mad and asked why he was called then and Devon proceeded to tell him all the things he had to do for his kids. One of which was to sign over his parental rights and give full custody to you. Congratulations, you’re legally their mother, with all the responsibility that goes with. In sickness and in health for as long as you all shall live.” He says as he hands over the papers to her. “Devon wanted this done right away, we had no problem finding a judge to sign off of them last night.” He says.

“Wait you were there yesterday morning and night? How many shifts did you work? Have you even slept since yesterday?” Lou asks concerned.



“No worries there, when I say we, I mean the whole precinct, I really do. Lieutenant Yardly was back at the house last night. You don’t need to know what was found but suffice it to say that on top of a capital murder charge there will be extortion and a couple of other white-collar crimes to add to the list. His partner in crime was brought in this morning. His wife did not take the news well, needless to say. They have two other children who have heard the news as well. I would not want to be that family today. Knowing your father helped in the demise of your own brother. Oh, here is a number of a good friend of mine, he does construction and he even does blood clean ups – you’d be surprised how hard it is to get out of flooring. He is the best but not necessarily the cheapest. Since it has been sitting there, a floor redo might be in order.” He hands the card to Corinne.

“Ok, I’ll give him a call. Lou go finish getting dressed we have to leave, eat breakfast and get the kids to school quickly. Go!” she tells her friend. Lou looks down at herself and runs upstairs to become presentable for public viewing.

“I can’t thank you enough,” Corinne says to the officer.

“Permission to date Lou?” he asks Corinne.

“Permission granted.” She smiles. “Let’s go everyone, Carmine is waiting.” She calls to everyone who promptly show up in front of her with backpacks on their backs.

“Ready.” Calvin says, “But the baby doesn’t want to go to school today.” He says.

Corinne squats down to her. “Guess what these papers say?” she says to Nancy’s face. The child shrugs.

“It says you will be living with me from now on, it says that I am your mommy in the eyes of the law and that you are my children. Would you like to come back to the big house and live with me?”

All three children tackle her on the floor and smother her with hugs and kisses. “Aw, puppy love and I missed it. What’s the occasion to love Corinne, not that I need one,” Lou says.

“The kids are legally hers,” Officer Abraham says.

Lou looks at him in the eye, she jumps into his arms and hugs and kisses him. “Whoo hoo!!!! No school today!!! It’s celebrate Mom day,” she calls out.

The kids all look down at Corinne, she thinks a moment, she is going to have to explain a lot to them today, maybe one day will be ok. “All right, I’ll call school and let them know, put away your bags but let’s get going I’m starved. You coming Officer?” Corinne looks at him and then at Lou. Lou is grinning and Corinne knows what that grin is.

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Surprisingly the story of Devon and his silent partner did not make the front pages. The prosecutors had enough evidence against them that Devon caved instantly and confessed. His partner tried to deny everything even though his fingerprints were found on the knife that killed his own son. When the gavel came down pronouncing him guilty, he finally realized that he was not coming out of this for a long time.

Corinne, Carmine and Lou were at the proceedings each day. The partner’s wife and family were not. Corinne made sure to tell the kids their father was involved in bad business

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practices and that is why he has to go to jail. She and Carmine decided not to tell them the whole truth. When they are old enough to find out the truth, they will tell them.

Officer Abraham has turned out to be a great new friend to all of them. His carpenter friend fixed up the house so well, no one can tell anything happened. The original contractors doing the work for Corinne backed out, they felt the house had bad karma and wouldn’t finish the job. As part of his sentence, Devon was made to pay them a lot of money as well as to the family of the injured worker. The new guy finished the basement, it is now a large playroom and movie room. Carmine paid for that, he insisted that they have one, he loves movies but hates to pay theater prices so he created a theater feel in half of the basement.

The attic has been finished to accommodate real storage closets. He put shelves and cubbies all around the walls and Corinne now has a place to put winter coats and other seasonal needs in a proper place. The guest room was redone completely, they gutted the room and made every part new. The kids picked out the colors of their own rooms and the guest room.

Lou and the officer have been seeing each other non-stop since they met. Corinne can’t wait to make the wedding plans with her. Lou would say yes if he asked her tomorrow.

Carmine and Corinne wanted to wait until the trials were over to make sure what they felt was real and not a side bar to something else. Little Nancy calls him Daddy Carmine and he eats her words up every time.

Lou and Corinne will most likely plan their weddings together. Corinne’s family loves Carmine and are thrilled to have the kids back in their lives. There will be no shortage of love any more.