

Readers and V I herself often are frustrated at the conclusion of one of her adventures because the baddies don't face enough justice. I felt that at the end of Critical Mass, but the book was complete in a literary way, and adding to it would have ruined the balance. This chapter, completely new here for Suspense Magazine, shows what happened after Critical Mass ended. Spoiler Alert: Don't read this if you haven't read Critical Mass—it reveals many details about the novel.

Beyond the Ending: Is it Justice?

I hit the street, arms over my head, when I heard the report. Thunder may sound like a gunshot, but a rifle never sounds like anything else: you know a weapon has been fired.

People were screaming and diving for cover.

Twenty-Sixth and California is lousy with cops and sheriff's deputies; they were already swarming, outfitted with riot helmets and assault weapons.

It was impossible toWhen I didn't hear any more shots, I got cautiously to my knees and shuffled to the curb, huddling behind a parked car. I couldn't tell where the shot had come from, or if anyone had been hit, but the thicket of cameras that had sprouted outside the courthouse, waiting for the verdict in Illinois v. Cordell Breen, was trained on the stairs in front of the entrancefront steps. That was where the cops were headingA crowd gathered behind them., too. Twenty-Sixth and California is lousy with cops and sheriff's deputies; they were already swarming, outfitted with riot helmets and assault weapons.

A car honked furiously, rubber squealing as it just missed meswerved away from the parking strip. That was when I realized I had dropped for cover in the middle of the street. The driver stuck his head out the window to swear at me. He had special state plates, some deputy

or prosecutor who could park by the courthouse and wanted to run over lowlifes in his path.

“You’d better get out of here before the road is blocked off,” I said, getting to my feet, but my advice came too late: squad cars, their goose horns honking angrily, were covering blocking all the intersections near the courthouse and jails. They also were blocking covering the exit to the parking garage across from the courts. I was going to be here for a while, so I went back to the west side of the street, where the cameras and cops and everyone else were jammed. A crowd was starting to build.

Sheriff’s deputies began bringing up sawhorses to cordon them away.

The When the police were clearingcleared a path for an ambulance crew; , I followed the stretcher bearers to where the TV cameras were set up as far as the television cameras. Murray Ryerson had persuaded Global Entertainment to let him cover the trial. He’s six-four, with red hair, easy to spot. I used the bruising elbows I’d perfected with my hockey-playing cousin to force people out of my way.

“What happened?” I asked.

Murray glanced at me but kept speaking into his microphone. “Just moments after the jury declared him not guilty on all but one of twenty-seven counts of a criminal indictment, Cordell Breen has crumpled on the stairs in front of the Cook County Criminal Courts, an apparent victim of a gunshot. An ambulance crew is on the scene and we’ll. Global News will keep you updated as events unfold.

“Meanwhile, here with me is Chicago investigator V. I. Warshawski, who played a major role in getting the state to bring charges against

Breen. She was also a key witness for the state. Vic, what were your thoughts when the jury brought in their 'not guilty' verdicts?"

My thoughts had included fury at the outcome, followed by how much I disliked watching Richard Yarborough in victory.

I had wanted to flee the courtroom, but I was wedged into the middle of one of the benches and couldn't get out. I fumed while Dick turned a dazzling smile on Cordell Breen. He clasped Breen's forearm with one hand, and put the other around his client's shoulder. While As he man-braced Breen, Dick scanned the courtroom, nodding at journalists, but really looking for me, wanting to gloat in person.

He released Breen and walked through the swinging gates to the benches. He had to lean across several people, hitting them with his jacket, but he ignored their protests: What were the spectators ever going to do for him?

"Vic, you know how much respect I have for you. You did a heck of a job." His smile managed to combine pity with arrogance.

Dick hadn't been the lead on the defense—he doesn't do criminal law—but as a senior partner at Crawford, Mead, he showed up most days. After all, Breen was one of the firm's most important—i.e., richest—clients, and he was on trial for counts ranging from criminal fraud to accessory to murder.

My final thought on hearing the verdict: if I'd stayed married to Richard Yarborough I'd be in the Logan Correctional Center right now, serving natural life for murder. I didn't say any of this to Murray with a live mike under my nosekept all those thoughts to myself.

“I thought the state’s attorney brought the case in well,” I said instead. “It’s always disappointing when you have cast-iron evidence and the jury votes against you, but of course the jury system is the bedrock of our democracy.”

“Someone didn’t agree,” Murray said. “Cordell Breen was shot as he stood on the top step, straightening his necktie.”

“You don’t know that he was the target,” I objected. “There are a lot of guns around here. You have angry husbands, betrayed wives, and a whole freight car full of drug dealers. Breen could have been hit by accident.”

Murray narrowed his eyes at me, but didn’t say anything: he was listening to a voice inside his earpiece. “The Chicago Fire Department is taking Cordell Breen to Stroger Hospital, where the city’s top trauma surgeons will be waiting. This is Murray Ryerson, live at the Cook County Criminal Courts.”

He switched off his mike and glared at me. “Are you running for office, Warshawski? ‘The jury system is the bedrock of our democracy?’”

“I hope you don’t disagree, Murray—you’d have to go back to Miss Motley’s remedial civics class.”

“And that clap-doodle about the state’s attorney bringing the case in well—by the end of the third day, I was prepared to think someone had paid her to look as ineffectual as possible,” Murray said.

The same thought had crossed my mind, as Sonia de Winter fumbled her cross-examination of Jari Liu, who worked in R & D at Metargon—the head of computer R & D at Metargon, the company that

Breen owned and ran. She'd DeWinter had been equally uncertain when she interrogated Breen's wife, who was testifying on our side.

I certainly wasn't going to say as much to Murray Ryerson, though, even with the mike turned off. Time was when I could trust him with my private thoughts on the criminal justice system, but those days had disappeared along with his job at the Herald-Star. Now, as he scrambled for face time on cable news, he was willing to say almost anything. In fact, the wilder the statement the better—that helped him go viral on YouTube.

"I don't suppose you shot Breen yourself, did you?" Murray asked hopefully.

"Don't you need to get over to the hospital?" I asked. "You wouldn't want Fox or ABC to scoop you with word about Breen's condition."

His crew had the same concern; I could hear someone's voice coming scratchily from through his earpiece. His camerawoman was tapping his arm impatiently.

"Cops are letting news crews out, but they're inspecting everyone's equipment, so we need to get going," the camerawoman said.

I tagged along behind them. It would be hours before I'd be able to get my own car out of the parking garage, so I tagged along with them. The whole area was under tight security by now. The cops waved us into the Global Entertainment van, giving our bags a cursory check for weapons.

As we nosed around the police cordon, we heard a loudspeaker announcement from the CTA: the California Avenue bus was being rerouted to Western, half a mile to the east. People who'd spent a long

day in court to support a loved one were trudging along the side streets, faces bleak. Some were towing small children, who whimpered at the long walk. One woman, with a corona of white hair, was slowly pushing a walker with the bowed head of someone long inured to hardship. I suggested to Murray that we give her a lift—it would be a good human-interest story—but he wanted to get to the hospital along with the rest of the rat pack.

“What do you know about this?” Richard Yarborough was in my office, whining and petulant. I can’t say I liked his whiney, petulant persona, but it was a lot easier to take than his gloating.

He’d called as I was packing up my office for the day. He tried to order me to visit him at Crawford, Mead’s offices near the river, but I refused, on the simple grounds that I didn’t want to talk to him. If he was desperate to see me, he could slum it in my Humboldt Park warehouse.

“As for what I know, Cordell Breen was killed by a single bullet that went through the middle of his face at four-seventeen yesterday afternoon. I learned that from reading the paper this morning. You probably know more, being the guy’s counsel and privy to all his secrets.”

Breen had been dead when the ambulance picked him up. They’d taken him to the hospital for tactical, not medical reasons.—given the size of the crowd, they wanted to deal with examining the body in a private space.

The According to the papers, the police hadn’t found the murder weapon, but the bullet had come from a hunting rifle, not an assault weapon.

Dick's nostrils twitched. "I wouldn't put it past you to have done it yourself, just because you hate to lose."

I let silence build for a moment. "Dick, that had better be a joke."

He flushed, but muttered, "You always bring out the worst in me."

"You slandered me because I made you do it? That's the most feeble apology I've ever heard. If you came here to accuse me of murder, you'd better go right now, or believe me, you will leave on a stretcher yourself."

"It's true, though," he insisted. "You can't stand losing."

"Whereas you embrace it? Come on, Dick. You know we couldn't stay in the same room together when we were studying for the same test back in law school. Why did you really want to see me so urgently?"

"Breen dying like that, just at the moment we cleared his name—who besides you could have such a grudge against him, or against us for that matter?"

'Us' being Dick's law firm—which he'd spoken about reverently ever since he first joined, back in the days when he and I were husband and wife. "Breen's wife. Your team made her look like a bitter drunken has-been. Martin Binder—your client murdered his grandmother—"

"Was found not guilty," Dick interrupted me hotly.

"Oh, please, Dick. Your client's henchman and a bent sheriff's deputy murdered Kitty Binder on Cordell's orders. Ditto Julius Dzornen. Ditto Derrick Schlafly, not that he's any loss to society. Ditto for Bowser—"

"Bowser?" Dick said.

“Schlafly’s dog,” I said. “And then, you have all those Metargon shareholders, furious with Cordell for ruining their investment. When they learned he and his father stole a patent from a Holocaust survivor, the share price plummeted, and it did not show any bounce when the verdict came in: the market thinks your guy was guilty and the shareholders are a peevish and embittered bunch.”

“So you think Martin Binder killed Cordell?”

I got up. “Leave, Dick. You are an insane person tonight right now and I don’t have the patience for it.”

“I’m not leaving until you answer my questions.”

“You don’t have questions. You have offensive accusations. First me, then Martin? Why do you need to pin the murder on anyone?”

He pursed his lips, pushed his cuff back to look at his watch. He was trying to figure out what excuse I would buy.

“My partners are concerned,” he said. “They know you have special contacts with the police and the media.”

“You want me to call Murray Ryerson and tell him Crawford, Mead’s partners are concerned, so please release your private video foot—oh.” I interrupted myself. “You’re billing the Metargon company, not Breen as a private individual. And their board is balking at the bill. Must run to about six million, doesn’t it?”

“We could be tied up in litigation for years,” Dick said plaintively.

“My heartstrings are truly tugged, but I will not confess to a murder I didn’t commit just to clear your profit center for the year. Go home to

Terri, let her tell you what a handsome hero you are and what a bitch I am.”

He glared again. “I’m sorry I misspoke. My partners are hoping you know something.”

“I’m not working for you, Dick. You know that would be a total disaster.”

“We’d pay a good five figures for any information you have,” he said.

“You’re way too used to having your own way. Even a good six or seven figures wouldn’t tempt me. I really do not care who killed Cordell Breen. The police will jump through hoops for you and for Metargon; that has to be enough, even for your vanity.”

It was true: I didn’t care who killed Breen. The story was certainly a nine-day wonder, not just in Chicago but internationally, given that Breen had headed one of the world’s largest electronics companies, but my own work was keeping me busy. When the murder receded from the front pages, I stopped thinking about it.

That changed the afternoon Alison Breen came into my office. I’d seen her at her father’s trial, and she’d looked then as though she hadn’t slept in a while. where she clearly hadn’t slept in a while. In my office, with the March sun coming coldly through the skylights, she didn’t look much different from the beaten-down young women turning tricks at the end of the street. Her chestnut hair had lost its glossy sheen, her nails were bitten down to the quicks and her eyes were red-rimmed and puffy from lack of sleep.

“Vic, please, you have to help me.”

I ushered her into the armchair in the alcove I’ve created for client meetings. “What’s the problem?” Besides her father being accused of murder, then getting murdered himself, and her mother testifying against him, what else could be wrong?

“I think—the police have been acting really weird—they’re talking like—” She kept interrupting herself, and then stopped altogether.

“Like what?”

“Mother came over this morning. Really, like three in the morning. She was—she’d been drinking, she wasn’t herself—but she says this one detective, the way he’s talking, she’s afraid they think she killed Daddy.”

I shut my eyes, trying to remember the courtroom at the moment the verdict came in. “She was there, wasn’t she? And her friend, that woman—what’s her name?”

“Leila. Leila Mitchum. I really can’t stand her. She’s always talking like some dreary political slogan, how Mother is an archetype of the oppressed woman, how Daddy tried to buy her, and then broke her spirit, all this stuff that is just stupid and horrible to listen to. And then she likes to go drinking with Mother, which I hate even worse. But, yeah, Leila and Mother were there when the verdict came in.”

“Does your mother know how to shoot?”

“We all do,” Alison said. “Mother grew up with guns, and she and Daddy used to go target-shooting, back—well, before this year, before everything turned crazy. Daddy felt, since we were kidnapping risks, we should know some basics of self-protection, so Mother and I took kung fu

together when I was in high school. And we all know how to use guns, although I hate them, personally.”

“Aside from the fact that your father’s lawyers made your mother look bad on the witness stand, does she have any reason to have shot your dad?”

“Vic! I came to you for help, not for you to build a case against her.”

“Darling, I can’t do anything to help until I understand why the police suspect her. Didn’t your father try to strip her assets?”

“He tried to take away her voting shares in Metargon,” Alison whispered. “We were having a big argument about that while the trial was going on. He was so angry that she was testifying against him. It was horrible in court. Daddy sort of apologized to me, but he was in a red rage, you know, and he kept telling me it was my fault for trying to fight him when he only wanted what was best for me and for the company.”

Her red-rimmed eyes filled with tears. Alison had been subpoenaed by the state, which treated her gently. Her father’s lawyers—my ex-husband and his team—had been less forgiving. If they’d painted her mother as an embittered drunk, they’d tried to make Alison look like a greedy young woman grasping for control of a fifty-billion-dollar business.

“Anyway, Daddy’s lawyers were trying to tie up her shares, but I don’t think they’d been able to. Mother gave up the Lake Bluff house as part of their divorce, not that it had become final before—” her mouth worked. “Last week, you know, when Daddy—but, anyway, Mother gave up the house.”

“Who inherits it?”

Alison shook her head. "I don't know. Mother, if she hadn't signed anything. Or me, I guess."

I could see why the cops were interested in Constance Breen. She hadn't seemed like the kind of person who wanted to be involved in a bitter fight over assets, but perhaps her husband's attitude drove might have driven her into a more vindictive position. Or perhaps her friend Leila pushed her there.

"I'm sorry to talk to you about it clinically, Alison, but the shot that killed your father—that took a really skilled marksman. Is your mother that good a shot?"

"I don't know. I don't know!" she cried. "I thought I knew my father, but it turned out he was like some kind of monster, killing people who got in his way. So how can I say what I know about my mother?"

I nodded; I could see why she was suffering so acutely. Billionaire's daughter or not, she was walking on a floor where the boards kept disintegrating underfoot. "Is that what you want me to do? Find out what your mother is really like?"

"If she turns out to be just as monstrous—" Alison tore at her cuticles, her voice a hoarse whisper. "—how can I know what I might be like? Maybe I'm just as able to switch from nice girl to killer."

"I don't think so," I said, "but I do see what a snakepit you're staring into. I'll find out what I can."

Bobby Mallory is a police captain, with a secretary and a couple of sergeants at his beck and call, but in his rookie year, he was partnered with my dad. The two remained close until my father's death: my Jewish

mother was godmother to Bobby's eldest Catholic daughter, Bobby was one of Gabriella's and then Tony's pallbearers.

When I started as an investigator, it felt like a slap to him—Bobby didn't like to see women in non-traditional roles. He's changed with the times, though, seen women become good police officers, seen me land on my feet in tricky situations, and the affection he felt for me because of my parents has lost its grudging edge. Still, my arrival in his office at police headquarters didn't make never makes his face light up with joy.

"You must be in worse trouble than usual if you're bypassing the Finch and Conrad to see me," he growled.

I bent down and pecked his cheek. "I'm not in trouble at all. I'm here as a very virtuous citizen giving you a heads-up. Alison Breen has hired me to find out what role, if any, her mother played in Cordell Breen's death."

Bobby rubbed his forehead. His knuckles were swollen with arthritis, which made my stomach clench. I hate aging and dying. I'd lost my parents. I needed Bobby to look invincible, not like someone who was aging and might die.

"I knew the investigation could only get worse," Bobby said. "I don't suppose I could ask, plead, beg or order you to tell Ms. Breen that we have the situation well in hand and no one will railroad her mother?"

I couldn't help laughing, but I treated the question as rhetorical. "Is Constance Breen a person of interest? Can she shoot well enough to get one shot into a man from five hundred yards away?"

"How do you know the distance?" Bobby demanded.

"I figured the shooter had to be in the parking garage; there's no place to take cover on the street and there must be a hundred surveillance cameras on that stretch of California. Did you find the shell casing?"

"Every punk in America watches too many NCIS and CSI episodes; they all know they're supposed to pick up their shell casings after they've murdered someone. But I don't suppose it will derail the investigation if you know that the bullet came from an older hunting rifle, not from a fancy assault weapon. The shooter was either lucky or very good. It was a hell of a shot. Heck of a shot," he corrected himself hastily: he's accepted the fact that I'm a competent investigator, but not that I can listen to vulgarity and swearing without collapsing.

"And is Constance Breen that kind of shooter?" I asked.

"Hard to believe, but she won medals at the gun club she and Breen belong to. Belonged to. Of course, killing a man is different from hitting skeet, but shooting at a distance, you don't see the blood or hear the lungs groaning for air, you could imagine it you'd nailed was one more clay target."

"Does she Ms. Breen have the weapon?"

"Her father did," Bobby said. "It was a Mannlicher. Forensics says an antique, probably dating to the 1920s. Kind of thing Hemingway liked to carry around Africa."

My eyes widened: Bobby had never struck me as a reader. He saw my expression and made a face. "That's what Houssak in Forensics said,

not me. You could kill a lion with it the Mannlicher, and Constance Breen's father bagged his share."

"So Constance Breen came from money as well as marrying it?"

"Her family was old money that they lost. It's like something out of some crappy novel or movie: Cordell Breen the brash millionaire, Constance Hargreave the artistic last descendant of someone who came on the Mayflower or the Pinta or something. Breen's dough let Constance's father spend his life drinking whisky and killing endangered animals. He died, oh, maybe ten years ago and she got the gun collection because that was all Hargreave had to leave her."

"You got enough to make an arrest?"

Bobby scowled at a fat file on his desk. "She's a better candidate than anyone else we're looking at. Breen was playing hardball over the divorce and he was a smart and quick and dirty fighter, so he was able to shut down a lot of her accounts. Of course, she still has a few million, enough to buy a stable of her own legal counsel. And the kid, if she likes her mom, can bail Constance out to any tune you want to name."

Meaning, justice may be blind, but she has an acute sense of touch: she knows when she's about to bump into the kind of influence that makes a cop's life hard.

When I got up to go, Bobby said, "You know something that will make us look in a different direction?"

"No. I know nothing. Where does she say she was when her husband was killed?"

“She was waiting for someone to pick her up. Potty-mouthed woman who won’t leave her side. Constance can’t prove it, but we can’t disprove it. No witnesses except the potty-mouth, who we figure would say anything.”

“You’re sure Cordell was the intended target?” I asked.

Bobby’s blue eyes narrowed to slits in his round face. “You do know something. What?”

“I really know nothing, Bobby. Just—the street’s lousy with drug dealers coming to see if their homeys are ratting them out. Someone could have missed, that’s all.”

“Be your age, Vicki,[1]” Bobby said. “Someone who could nail Breen over the heads of eleven camera crews and God knows how many flashing strobes was not missing a shot directed at a Latin King. If Breen had had a bull’s-eye painted between his eyes, she couldn’t have done better.”

I called Murray from my car. “I want to see all the video footage you have of the street.”

“Any particular street, oh She Who Must Be Obeyed?”

“California Avenue, the day of Breen’s murder.”

“The cops have already subpoenaed copies and come up dry. What do you know that they don’t?”

“I’ve been told someone from the Cubs pitching rotation had a good enough aim to hit Breen. I don’t believe it, but I want to see if any of their starters were outside the courthouse.”

He Murray was silent, thinking it over, wondering what I was hiding, but he finally agreed to show me the footage. “But I get to watch it with you. And you feed and water me.”

Murray drank Holstein’s, five bottles. I primly sipped Black Label. Murray objected that the bag of pretzels I set on my office work table didn’t constitute food, but I told him I didn’t want grease or sauce on my big computer screen.

We looked at footage for two hours, slowly, stopping sometimes for a frame-by-frame view. Murray’s camerawoman had shot a lot of street footage while the crews waited for word to filter down from the jury room. Bobby was right—there was no sign of Constance Breen on the street.

The courtroom had been filled with senior staff from Metargon as well as families of people whose death Cordell Breen had helped engineer. I watched the footage of them descending the courthouse stairs after the verdict.. Jari Liu, head of one of the software divisionscomputer R & D, was one of the first to leave. Jeanine Susskind, who’d been a neighbor of Kitty Binder’s, —one of the victims of Breen’s murdering frenzy—alleged murdering frenzy—had come for the verdict, as had Kitty’s daughter, Judy. Judy had been a major state witness, since the same thugs who murdered killed her mother had shot her as well. Unfortunately, the killers had worn pantyhose over their heads the night they shot her and Kitty, so she Judy couldn’t pick them out definitively.

Herta Dzornen Colonna, Julius Dzornen’s older sister of yet another murder victim, had come for much of the trial, accompanied usually by one of her daughters. The day of the verdict, as far as I could remember

who'd been in the courtroom, she Herta seemed to have been alone. Watching the camera footage, At least, she certainly came out of the courthouse alone, walking slowly with the aid of her cane, her white hair sticking out around her head like dandelion pollen. Perhaps, like Constance's Constance Breen's belligerent potty-mouthed friend, the Herta's daughter had gone to get the car to spare her mother a longer walk.

A long walk Crossing across Twenty-Sixth street to Damen Avenue. Surely she was the same woman I'd seen, that could be a long walk for a woman bent over a walker when I left the courthouse.

"What are you staring at?" Murray demanded. "Is that Dzornen's sister? You think someone with fingers like that could aim a rifle and pull a trigger?"

Osteoarthritis had bent and twisted Herta's hands.

"I think you missed a chance to get a human-interest story out of her when you were fleeing the scene right after the murder."

"You fled with me," Murray said.

"Yep, so I did."

We watched the cops push shove the camera crews back from the foot of the steps as the doors opened for Cordell Breen and his entourage. He stood We watched Breen stand at the top of the stairs in his four-thousand-dollar custom tailoring, looking energetic, youthful, a man ready to go back to the boardroom and make new history in electronics, not like a ruthless killer in his seventies.

He Breen exchanged some kind of joke with my ex-husband. The lawyers all laughed in a polite fakey way, and then Breen pushed them away and stood alone on the stairs for a theatrical moment, straightening the knot in his tie, looked looking straight at the cameras. When his face exploded, it happened almost in silence: the cameras were trying to pick up his conversation with his lawyers, and so the mikes didn't catch the bullet and the recoil. Bobby was right: no one else could possibly have been the target.

"So what did you learn?" Murray demanded.

"It's horrible to see a man die in front of your eyes. That image will stay in my head a long time."

"But who killed him?"

"You know tThe cops think it was Constance Breen. I didn't see her in your files, but she must might have left by a side door. The deputies will do that to keep someone out of the camera range, you know."

"I know they're the state is looking at Constance's bank accounts, and they're inspecting the little arsenal she inherited from her old man. Tiger Hargreaves, that was what they used to call him."

"'They' being all the hearty boys at his club who liked the spectacle of beaters shoving a tiger in front of a man with an arsenal."

Murray glared at me. "Why do you have to be such a frigging killjoy all the time?"

"I didn't like Cordell Breen, but that shot, the kill shot. That's hard to watch. I guess the TV crews were kind of beaters, too, weren't they, setting him up for someone with a rifle."

“That is the fucking last straw, Warshawski. I did not lose a night’s sleep from covering his death and I’m not going to have you guilt me into it now.”

“I wasn’t trying to,” I said. “I was thinking of something else and that came out.”

It wasn’t much of an apology and I didn’t blame Murray for stalking away in a major huff. When he’d left, I stared for a long time at the whisky in my glass. The cops were taking Constance Breen seriously as a candidate for murder. The evidence might be unsatisfactory, but people have been tried on less evidence than owning the right caliber rifle. They’ve been convicted on even less than that.

I swallowed the rest of the Black Label and drove over to the Gold Coast, to Herta Dzornen’s building. Gordon, the doorman, knew me by sight and didn’t like me, but when he called to announce me, Herta told him I could come up.

I stopped at the glass étagère where her father’s Nobel Prize medallion lay and looked at the photographs around it. I could hear the hiss, breath sucked in too quickly, when I picked up the old snapshot of herself and her sister as little girls, following their mother up a mountain trail, all three carrying rifles.

“The walker,” I said, when we were sitting on the white furniture in her living room. “It had that little box thing that you can sit on. That’s where you put the rifle after you shot Breen, but where did you park the walker during the trial?”

She Herta kneaded her twisted hands, the gesture she and her half-sister Kitty had in common. "How did you know?"

"I saw you pushing it up California, after they blocked off the street, but you came out of the courthouse just using your cane."

"They inspect everything when you go in," she Herta said. "I knew I'd never get it past the metal detectors. I left it the walker in the parking garage, chained to a railing with a bicycle chain up on the fifth floor. I thought it would be an omen: if someone stole it while I was in the courthouse, then Breen was intended to live. If it was still there, then, well, the opposite."

"That photograph of you and Bettina with your mother—was that you used herher rifle?"

Herta looked at me for a long pause, then nodded fractionally. "My grandfather Rosenzweig had been an officer in the German Army; that was his military rifle. It still handles beautifully. It's Greek-made, actually, not German, but the machining is perfect."

"Why?" I asked. "I didn't think you cared that much about your brother."

Her mouth worked. "I cared deeply about Julius. How he was before Cordell and Edward Breen destroyed him, I mean. You don't know what he was like—a sensitive joyous boy. He was passionate about science and music, and then suddenly he became a shell of himself. For a long time, he wouldn't talk at all, and then he turned into this sarcastic person, if you asked him anything or tried to get him to go back to school

or find a job, he would only say something cutting, but never anything real.

“When you told me what the Breens had done, how they’d forced Julius to be part of their lies and murders, I thought my heart would break. They destroyed him, they became wealthy and successful, they ate with presidents and sports and theater stars while Julius languished in Cordell’s old coach house.

And I thought, this one time, Cordell won’t succeed. At first, I was sure he Cordell would be found guilty, but as the trial progressed, I could see that the jury didn’t like the state’s attorney, or didn’t trust her. And I thought, this one time, the Breens will not succeed.

“I thought I would have one chance, that it would be too hard to find him Cordell in the open any other time than when he left the courthouse. I told my daughter I needed to hear the verdict alone, that I would be too upset to be with anyone if he were found not guilty. She didn’t like it, but she agreed.

“I left as soon as the foreman started saying, ‘not guilty.’ When you’re old and disabled, no one looks at you. I made it into the garage and—it was amazing to me. I hadn’t been hunting since we moved to Chicago—we used to shoot when my father was at Los Alamos, my mother and sister and I used to go up into the mountains and shoot at small game, and I became very good. It was so strange, picking up the Mannlicher again, feeling it come to life. I cleaned it, found some shells, but I only needed one. And then I took it apart, put it in the little sitting box of the walker, and became an invisible old woman again. The police

were searching handbags and briefcases, but they wouldn't bother an old lady with a walker."

She blinked away tears. "Poor Julius. My poor brother."

We sat in silence for a time. She finally wiped her eyes with a lace handkerchief.

"What will you do now?" she asked, after a long silence.

"I will ask you to go to the police and tell them that you were standing on California Avenue, waiting for the bus, and watched Constance Breen waiting on the curb near the bus stop. I will ask you to tell the police that you saw her get into a car and drive away just as her husband emerged from the courthouse."

"Why? What do you want from me? Do you want to be paid?"

I smiled sadly. "I'm not blackmailing you. I'm not even asking you to return to Martin Binder the money you took from his mother all those years ago. I've spent the last six months looking back at seventy years of terrible, irreparable pain. I don't think I can bear to spend another minute with it, that's all."

I got to my feet. Herta stood, too, slowly, and followed me to the door.

"Martin should know—he's a clever boy, I think, he could be another one like Julius or my father. He should know, you'll tell him, that my father admired Martina beyond any other scientist he ever worked with."

[1] NB: Bobby Mallory is the only person who is ever allowed to call V. I. Warshawski "Vicki." To everyone else, she's Vic, V.I., Victoria or, when they're annoyed, "Warshawski."