

## 1. A STRANGER TO MYSELF

It was a perfect face. Smooth and white, like the mask of a ghost. Freshly powdered it said nothing, it said everything. It spoke of mysterious desire and smoky nights. It exuded purity.

It wasn't real. It covered up every flaw and human imperfection. It gave her licence. She could do whatever she pleased. Everyone wanted that perfect face. Even a smile might disturb its ideal.

Who would have done this to her? She was a slight blonde. She hung from a tree. Someone had done a really botched up job trying to tie her up. But the irregular pattern made it seem even more gruesome.

He had been the first to reach. As he rounded the bend, he could just make her out from the road. She had been left here to die. The attacker might have even been surprised by an oncoming car. Enough to quickly vacate the scene.

He had immediately radioed for help. Another police cruiser would be arriving in no time. At this point, he was the first on the scene. He jumped out of the car and left his brights shining on the tree where she was tied.

Warren drove the second car to arrive at the scene. Warren was the sheriff. As he got out of his car, he pulled his gun. It looked like trouble.

The man by the body had a knife close to her throat. He had his back to Warren.

"Jack, what the hell are you doing."

"I'm doing what any responsible person would do. I'm cutting her loose."

Warren maneuvered around her to see that exactly what was happening?

"You scared me for a minute. I thought that you were going to slash her right in front of me."

"Someone's already done a job on her. She's breathing. But she's unconscious."

"The ambulance is coming. I wasn't that far away. I had another call. How did you get here so fast?"

"I was going to stop by at Lynette's"

Warren was going to retire soon. He and Jack got along fabulously. Jack was like a son to him. All the deputies loved Warren. Jack showed him no envy at all.

She was a sight still tied to the tree with her blonde hair and long legs. Jack worked to free her.

"You've got to get her lying down, Jack."

"I need to make sure that nothing is broken."

"Some madman must have left her like this."

Jack always had his heart on being sheriff. He knew that it would only be time before Warren stepped aside. The promotion was already in the works.

They didn't try to revive her. They knew that the ambulance would be here forthwith. They could already hear the siren.

"They were quick this time."

"I told you that I called them in."

They rapidly put her on the stretcher and had her inside. They had her on an IV and oxygen.

“Her pulse seems good.”

Jack tapped the ambulance as it headed out. He yelled to the driver, “I’ll be there after we investigate what we’ve got here.”

There wasn’t too much to find at the scene. Most of the fibers seemed to be off her clothes. Jack had left a few threads when he cut her down. But the assailant had made a clean get away.

“I wondered what the person was driving. I never saw a car.”

Warren added his observation, “Neither did I.”

Warren kept shining the flashlight on the ground,

“Will you look at this?”

On the ground was a brown wallet with a license and twelve hundred dollars inside. “That’s a lot of cash to toss on the ground.”

“It probably fell in the struggle.”

“I’m surprised that her attacker didn’t pick it up.”

“I don’t think he knew it was around here.”

Warren told Jack that he could go, “I don’t think that we’re going to find anything else here tonight. I’ll send Jerry by in the morning.

Jack turned around and the scene went dark. Warren stood there as he watched Jack drive off.

When Jack arrived at the hospital, they had already revived her and then given her a sedative to sleep. He came back the next day to see her, “Someone really worked me over.”

“You’re looking good!”

She smiled back at him, “They told me that you found me.”

“A good thing too. I don’t know what that monster was thinking.”

“You know I can’t remember a thing about it. I’m even having trouble with my own name.”

“Warren found a wallet near the scene. It had a license and a bunch of money in it. The license said your name is Sienna.”

“I just don’t know. It sounds pretty. But I don’t feel that I can answer to it.”

She was still pretty groggy.

“You’re still slurring your words. I should let you sleep.”

Her smile was even bigger now, “Thanks!”

It took her a few days before she could even answer any questions. Warren went with Jack to the hospital room.

They asked her a whirlwind of questions. Few of them meant anything to her.

“What do you remember about the attack?”

“Nothing. All I remember is waking up in the hospital and seeing his smile” She pointed at Jack.

“You didn’t see his face?”

“Whose face? I saw nothing.”

She couldn’t tell who was asking the questions. It was all still a blur to her. They wanted specific answers. But nothing made sense enough to sort out any significant answers.

Warren and Jack talked to the doctor outside.

“She seems to have suffered a pretty serious memory loss. She can’t even answer to her own name. It’s not just the attack that is erased. So many details of her life are also a mystery to her.”

Warren wanted to ask more questions, “Maybe something that we say can snap her out of it.”

“It really doesn’t work like that. She needs time to recover. She has to feel that she is again in familiar surroundings. Part of her block is psychological. She fears waking up and having to face her assailant again.”

She felt as if she was still at an accident scene. She watched the flashing lights. She knew that they announced something more frightening. But she didn’t want to look. She was afraid that it would be near the point of death.

She had the illusion that once she left the hospital everything would be better. They could put her back together. Down deep she knew that was not true. But it helped her get better. It helped her forget that she could not remember.

She wanted to take a good long look at the accident. She wanted to see her face. This wasn’t like waking up from a nightmare. At least in a nightmare, there was some trace of the dream. She had no memory. Only the ill effects of the event.

Jack stopped by the next night. He was hoping to see some sign of a change. A memory. Some recollection from the accident. There was none. She seemed more alert. She recognized his face.

“It’s the smiling man.”

“I’m Jack.”

“Hello, Jack.” She sat up. She was glad to see him. She asked, “What did you come here to tell me?”

“I don’t have any news. I just wanted to see how you are doing.”

“I’ll be doing better when I get out of here.”

“I hope that will be soon.” She seemed to have a sense of humor. That was helpful. Maybe he was expecting too much all at once.

He talked to the doctor, “I wish that we could help you more. I can only tell you what she tells you. We don’t have an x-ray machine that reads her mind. She’s got to figure some things out on her own. Once she’s a little better, we’re going to start some psychotherapy. The therapist might be able to reconstruct chains of thought. The basis of her memories. Simple associations that can serve as building blocks.”

Jack listened carefully. This all seemed fascinating. Maybe the key that they wanted wasn’t that far away. He wanted to do his part so that he was around when she actually made a breakthrough.

“Jack, she perks up whenever she sees you.”

He could see the color in her cheeks. He thought that she was a very attractive woman. It gave him a sense of purpose. He was helping her get back on her feet.

Her image haunted him as he left the hospital. He wasn’t simply helping her back to reality. He was becoming part of a new life for himself.

He started reviewing the scene of the crime. How could he get some clue as to what had happened. He had come upon her when she was already tied up. That seemed to imply that she

had been overcome by her attacker much earlier. Not only was he able to entrap her, he needed to render her immobile in order to tie her up. But her resistance might have caused him to do a sloppy job. He just didn't seem to be in full control of the scene. The assailant had done his best to subdue her. But he had failed. On the other hand, she was in a pretty bad way when they arrive on the scene.

Each day that he went to the hospital, he flashed back to that night. But she was looking more and more different from the victim that he had first seen. She was now robust and vivacious. The trauma was being put in her past.

"They're not going to keep me in here much longer."

Jack quizzed her, "What are you going to do? You don't even know if you have a home."

"I don't know. I'm afraid to be on my own."

He still wondered how he could help. He couldn't bring her to live with him. That would seem too forward. He'd think of something.

Jack continued to call her Sienna. The name started to stick. Even if she had no other identity, that was a good beginning. Sienna was now walking on her own without a crutch. The major cuts and bruises were starting to heal. She'd need more time for a full recovery.

That night she faded in and out of sleep. She could see movement in the shadows. She was being lulled by the haze. She tried to sit up. For a moment she thought she saw a man at her door. The hospital floor seemed otherwise empty. No one would have seen him come and go. She put her hand out. It seemed that he was coming towards her. Then she faded out again.

That presence hung in the room until the nurse came by to check on her at 6AM

"How's my girl?"

"I'm doing all right. I had a little difficulty sleeping last night."

"Maybe we should have kept up with medicine to help you sleep."

"I think it was my nerves."

She was realizing that the hospital was no place for her. If someone was after her, it would be so easy to wander in the room. She was sure that they had closed-circuit TV. But her attacker could use a disguise and just slip in and out.

As Sienna ate her breakfast, she started to plan her exit from the hospital. She was feeling fit physically. At least, she thought that she could get around on her own. She just didn't know where to go.

Her doctor came by around 7.

"I think I'm going to release you tomorrow."

She was elated, but still a little shocked.

"We need a place for you to go. You really can't do too much strenuous. I know that you've been walking around here. But even that is going to be too much for you."

She wanted to make the best of things. She needed a friend. That evening Jack brought by his cousin. She worked as a nurse.

"I'm surprised that I haven't seen you around here with all the time that you've been here. Hi, I'm Lynette."

Lynette was more of a rural version of Sienna. A quick glance and someone might think they were sisters. Lynette was thin and also had blonde hair. She bore some of the ill effects of her time in Cordelia. But she still looked fit. She tried to exude confidence even though her life

ultimately had become a trap.

Lynette wanted to do what she could to help Sienna. She felt sympathetic over her plight.

“I’ve got an extra room at the house. You could stay there.”

“I’d feel like a bother.”

“Jack told me that you had nowhere to go.”

He gave Sienna an innocent stare.

“I’m just going to be a pest.”

“I can deal with a bed-ridden patient.”

“I’ll be up and around before you know it.”

“Then I’ll have a buddy to hang out with.”

Jack interrupted, “I don’t want to mess up this sister-fest.”

They all laughed.

Jack had his eyes on her since he came in. Sienna felt a little uncomfortable with the attention.

“Jack, you haven’t said much today. The cat’s got your tongue.”

“It’s been a long day. I had to go look at some accident near the interstate. It was a mess. It took hours to clean up.”

If it wasn’t for his intervention, she would have been killed that night. She didn’t want to fall for him. For now, he was her protector. She needed that knight to lead her out of the darkness. Once she made it back into the light, it would be her life.

Lynette joined in, “So is it settled? You can come to live with me.”

“Lynette, you’re being too nice to me.”

“There is no such thing as too nice.”

After they left Sienna had a strange let down. If it wasn’t for the both of them, she’d be helpless in the world. She had fought her way back from her injuries. That had given her the reason to live. But as she was getting better, she realized how alone she was. Her body was the only home she knew. And she felt even that body was borrowed from someone else.

When she looked at Jack, she felt that she had a reality. She had created an identity. She really was somebody. But who was that? How could she rely on him. He had just been doing his job. There would soon be another victim who would take his time, and she would be left on her own.

She was still taken by that smile in the darkness. For now, that was her comfort. She tried to smile as she faced the darkness alone. This would be her last night in here, and she needed courage.

What had her attacker been thinking as he bound her body to the tree? Was this just the beginning of some worse torture? She had already been beaten. Her body had been full of bruises. But where would he have stopped. She felt fortunate to have been unconscious for the ordeal.

What had prompted her to pass out? She imagined the incredible pain that she suffered. But the pain only weighed on her more as she thought about the mental anguish. She had been carrying it all this time. Who hated her so much? Who hid all his anger in the darkness until the next time that he would strike?

She was still undergoing all the stress of her ordeal. She had recovered somewhat from

the physical damage. But the psychological horror was deep. Her monster hid in the shadows of her mind. She needed to summon up her courage. She was becoming her own worse enemy. If she let down her guard, she only gave him further opportunity to take her down.

She repeated the accident scene that she had dreamed about the other night. This time it was Jack's accident on the interstate. Cars were piled together. She was pinned inside. This time she was the victim. And she saw herself ride by in another car. This other self wouldn't look at the accident. As she drove by, she made sure that she was looking the other way. That's how it needed to be. She left herself at the scene of the trauma.

She told Jack, "I've had trouble sleeping ever since the accident."

"Maybe you should take something for it."

"I just need to figure out who I really am. I stay awake just thinking that there's someone out there who wants to hurt me, and I don't know why."