

ONE

On the day she died, the body of Marilyn Monroe went missing for ten hours.

Usually the speculation around the circumstances of her death focuses on whether she accidentally overdosed, committed suicide, or was murdered. And if she was murdered, who would have wanted the thirty-six-year-old sex symbol dead? Was there a Kennedy conspiracy? Marilyn had been romantically linked to both President Kennedy and his brother Robert. And why was Kennedy cousin Peter Lawford one of the first to be called to the scene?

Eunice Murray, Marilyn's housekeeper, found her a little after 1 AM on August 5, 1962, dead of an apparent overdose of barbiturates, which included pentobarbital (sleeping pills) and chloral hydrate. The police weren't called to the scene for over four hours. Murray told the authorities she had to wait to get the okay from the Twentieth Century Fox Publicity Department and that it took a "bit of time."

Officers knew as they drove up the private driveway to the bougainvillea-covered home that Marilyn lay inside, dead. Murray greeted police at the door with two of Marilyn's physicians, Ralph

JULES ASNER

Greenson and Hyman Engelberg. They escorted detectives back to Marilyn's bedroom. The housekeeper seemed calm; she was even doing laundry, which was kind of weird considering it was five in the morning.

From the bedroom doorway, officers could see Marilyn's nude body lying facedown in what investigators call the "soldier's position." Her arms were by her side, her legs stretched out, and her face was burrowed in her pillow. This arrangement was odd for someone who had overdosed, because ODs almost always have convulsions and vomit before they die, and their body is left usually on their back, their limbs twisted. OD'ing on pills ain't pretty, but if you want to off yourself, it's less messy than blowing your brains out.

Most female suicides don't shoot themselves in the head.

Investigators found no glass by Marilyn's bedside for her to have used when she swallowed all the pills, and many of the police files and interviews conducted after her death have disappeared.

But I'm *most* fascinated by the hours that Marilyn's body seems to have disappeared—starting when the corpse left her house off Sunset Boulevard in Beverly Hills to the time it was checked into the LA County Morgue—over six hours later. Normally the drive would take half an hour, maybe forty-five minutes—but six hours?

I'd been told by someone who should really know that the transportation of her body was intercepted by members of a secret society of necrophiliacs. My person-in-the-know said that a lot of money changed hands so that several members of this society could have sex with her dead body.

Once Marilyn's body arrived at the morgue, there were more tales of postmortem sex. Every nurse, coroner's assistant, and janitor in Los Angeles claimed to have known someone who had some. There was even a song by that guy Tom whatever-his-name-is. So that was proof it was true.

"Totally true," I said to myself as I hit "save" on my laptop.

W H A C K E D

I pushed back from my desk and reached my hands toward the ceiling, trying to stretch out the knot in my back that came whenever I hunched over the computer writing. I wondered if I should try that new cupping technique I saw in *Us Weekly*. Cupping isn't really new—it's been around for centuries—but ever since Gwyneth showed up at a movie premiere with her back looking like a Nebraska field scored with crop circles, cupping had been the new old thing that people on both coasts were rushing to try to ease their joint ailments.

My thoughts of Marilyn and Gwyneth were interrupted by a sharp knock on the door. I straightened up, smoothed my hair, and yelled, "Come in," hoping it wasn't anyone with a question. Today was my first day back in the office after being gone all week and I was playing catch up and feeling even more overwhelmed than usual. Plus, my boyfriend, Dave, had some sort of surprise planned for tonight and had persuaded me to kick out of work early, so I was trying to get things here a little under control before trying to sneak away.

Tommy from wardrobe poked his head from around the door. "Hey, Dani, you got a sec? I want to show you some options real quick."

"Sure," I replied, relieved it was just a question about wardrobe and not my boss, Steve Jacobs, wondering why my revised pages for the show weren't finished.

"Do you think this is too much? For when we catch the guy at the end of Act Two?"

Tommy held up a T-shirt that read, "Crack open a cold one." I stared at it in disbelief.

"It's a real shirt they sell," Tommy said. "I got it off a necrophilia Web site."

"Crack open a cold one?" I repeated. "Jesus, and I thought I was sick. They actually have shirts?"

"Yep."

I didn't want to think about how Tommy knew where to find the

JULES ASNER

shirt on such short notice. All of a sudden the premise for my “Marilyn” episode made me feel very tired.

“I don’t know,” I told Tommy. “We’re kind of pushing it with the whole story line anyway, and we might push the network censors over the edge with the . . . shirt. I really don’t want to do anything to make them start looking at this episode any closer.”

Tommy tried not to look hurt. “So, too much?”

“Way too much. Just put the guy in something normal from the Gap or Aberzombie.”

Tommy shrugged and turned to leave, my pun totally going over his head. I had a feeling the shirt would find a home in Tommy’s closet.

“Jesus Christ,” I murmured to myself when the door was closed. Being a writer on a show was tough, but making a judgment call like that was easy.

Glancing at the clock, I hunched back over my laptop, back to Marilyn, whose unaccounted-for hours I was transforming into an episode of the show I wrote for, *Flesh and Bone*. I knew the Marilyn story inside out, because when I first moved to Los Angeles and got a job out of college, I was a second assistant to a major recording star who was obsessed with her. Being the second assistant didn’t mean I got to travel with the star on private jets or shield her from the crazy fans who would sleep on the pavement outside her hotel when she was touring. Instead, I did things like buy her tampons, pick up the mess when her dog had an “accident,” and make sure her soy milk was sugar-free. She was convinced sugar would zap her energy levels. I always got her the soy milk with sugar and just told her it was sugar-free.

Every morning I’d fetch her latte before rushing up to her glass mansion at the end of one of the bird streets above Turner’s Liquors on Sunset. She did Bikram Yoga every morning for ninety minutes and I had to be there when she was finished. The routine was always

W H A C K E D

the same. Walking into her private yoga room, I was always knocked flat by the 110-degree heat. Then I was enveloped in the overwhelming smell of sweat. I tried not to think of it as BO or I'd gag, but it was pretty pungent. She would walk toward me with one hand outstretched, the other wiping down her soaking wet body with a 500 thread count towel.

Weighing the Starbucks Venti cup in her hand, she'd gauge through the recycled cardboard cup if the temperature was just right. If it was too hot, she'd make me hold the lid until it cooled off and then hand it back to her so it could seal in the perfect temperature. If the latte had gone cold, I'd have to rush down the hill for a fresh cup.

When I placed the order at Starbucks, they'd ask me my name, and my employer always told me to say "Norma Jean." I could have said my name, but she didn't want to see "Dani" scrawled in crayon on the side of her latte. "Norma Jean," my recording star, didn't want me to use her real name, because she thought the barista might know it was for her and spit in the cup when no one was looking.

Sure, when I got *her* herpes medication refilled at the pharmacy I had to use my name, but for the coffee I had to let her be "Norma Jean." I was twenty-five and making a thousand bucks a week and didn't want to point out she was bonkers.

"Norma Jean" was completely obsessed with Marilyn. In her living room, high above the overstuffed red velvet couch, was a giant framed sepia print of herself in profile, frozen with her eyes closed and head thrown back, her homage to Marilyn. "Norma Jean" was obsessed with the story of Marilyn and the necrophiliacs. "Dani, you just don't know what it's like to have people want a piece of you, any piece of you," she'd tell me.

"I can't imagine. It's one more awful thing about being so famous," I'd reply gravely.

"The thing is no one ever *tells* you what will happen when you're

JULES ASNER

famous. There's no class you can take or school that will prepare you—it just happens and then your life gets so crazy that you can't help but think this wasn't what you signed up for.”

“I know you must feel like you're being hunted sometimes.”

“You have no idea. Do you know if those paparazzi didn't have cameras around their necks I could have them arrested for stalking, but because they're *press*”—she sneered the word—“they can do what they want, because it's a God-damn-fucking-freedom-of-the-press-constitutional-thing!”

“They're vultures,” I replied.

“And let me tell you, they're going to hunt me until I'm dead—they're going to chase me like they did Diana, and they won't be happy until they get photos of me lying on the pavement after a car accident, and then they're going to follow me to the hospital to have sex with my helpless dead body.”

She was starting to get a little manic; she always did when she mixed Diana and Marilyn in the same rant. I tried to calm her down. “That's why it's so good you have The Plan.”

She nodded vigorously. “The Plan is my only hope for being able to rest in peace. No one is going to violate my body when I'm dead!”

To make sure The Plan would work, we'd have drills, the way they do in New York in case there's another terrorist attack. “Norma Jean's” dead body was never to be left alone; her sister or brother would be the first to be called, and they would handle all details of contacting authorities and overseeing transportation. We were ready for the day when “Norma Jean” kicked it, so that her impeccably maintained body wouldn't be defiled. The Plan made her sleep well at night. Sometimes I'd put an Ambien in her Yogi Tea before bed so she really slept well.

“Norma Jean” hadn't had to use The Plan yet. She was still out there among the living, although I'd bet there wasn't much of a heart beating behind her left foam-covered saline breast implant.

I had no guilty feelings about turning her personal drama into an

W H A C K E D

episode of the show; I'd decided it was karma paying me back for all of the clean urine samples I personally provided for "Norma Jean's" court ordered maintenance tests. I turned to my computer screen:

NORMA JEAN

You don't have any idea what it's like to be famous.
They're going to hunt me down just like they did
Diana.

ASST. #2

I know, it's terrible. It's like you're a caged animal.

NORMA JEAN

That's why we have The Plan. The Plan will give
me the dignity in death that I deserve.
No one is going to defile me!

I scrolled ahead to when Norma was nice and dead, and the show's detective was on the scene.

Interior of a holding cell. Day. A uniformed policeman enters, accompanied by MAGGIE BLACK. They pull out two chairs and seat themselves next to the interrogating officer, then focus on Asst. #2.

MAGGIE BLACK

So was she afraid for her life? Did Norma Jean have reason to believe that someone was trying to kill her?

ASST. #2

She did have enemies . . . I mean, you don't get to be that successful without . . . trampling on some

JULES ASNER

people with your stilettos. But it didn't seem like anyone would want to KILL her.

MAGGIE BLACK

But she talked about her own death frequently. Would you say she had a fixation about death?

ASST. #2

Yes, she did seem fixated on death. She was terrified at the thought of what they did to Marilyn—after she died. She was very concerned about someone trying to do anything to her body after she passed on.

One of the first rules of police work and case investigation that I'd learned by shadowing the real investigators was that random acts of violence were actually pretty rare. If someone got murdered, the murderer was likely someone the victim knew. So the investigators would concentrate on the immediate family of a victim, then move on to the boyfriend or coworkers. They think of it as a circle and work their way outward.

For this episode, the cops would put pressure on Assistant Number Two and she would eventually crack, spilling out her hatred for Norma Jean and admitting she murdered her.

Assistant Number Two wouldn't have sex with the dead Norma Jean—that would be over the line. We'd just throw in Norma Jean's obsession with necrophilia and that she needed The Plan.

The necrophilia thing would just be played up big because it was, well, sweeps. Sweeps are the all-important ratings periods that occur four times a year and measure shows' viewership. These numbers then dictate what the network can charge advertisers for commercials during the show. We always planned on doing our biggest and most exciting shows during these sweep weeks. Not only was it

W H A C K E D

sweeps, but this was the first time I'd ever written a show all by myself, and I was feeling edgy about it.

Our production schedule could be brutal, and sometimes we shot different episodes simultaneously, which could sometimes be hard on the actors, who would get confused over what dead body they were supposed to be squinting at on the metal autopsy gurney.

The turnaround time for a one-hour episode was usually fourteen days. The director and crew would prep the episode for three days, then shoot for a week straight. The rest of our time would be gobbled up in editing and all of the postproduction work required to make a show perfect. The Marilyn show was being rushed through shooting and postproduction because the network was so excited about the story line. I'd missed most of the shooting because of my trip, but there were still a couple of last-minute scenes that were being rewritten and shot, with the show set to air in only eight days.

The network executives had even come through with the extra money for us to cast Jennifer Love Hewitt as Assistant Number Two. Love, as she liked to be called, was the star of her own hit show on CBS, *The Ghost Whisperer*, but they had wrapped shooting for the season. In a recent interview featured in *InTouch Weekly*, Love had proclaimed herself *Flesh and Bone's* "number one fan." Steve Jacobs made a few calls and rushed her over a copy of the shooting script. Love *loved* that the role played against her nice girl image, and committed to playing Assistant Number Two right away. The suits at the network loved the idea of featuring one of its biggest stars on a highly promoted sweeps episode. Everybody won.

The remnants of my lunch, a turkey sandwich (hold the mayo) from Quiznos, lay next to my computer. This reminded me to enter my points online. Quickly saving out of the show script, I navigated over to the Weight Watchers' Web site. Because I was a member, it dumped me right into the calorie manager page. I selected the date and the day's blank menu page filled the screen. Dragging the cursor

JULES ASNER

over to the breakfast category, I entered in what I'd eaten that day. Half a scone from Starbucks and a latte—that right there was ten points. Those scones were a killer—even when you just ate half they were still as big as a football. The Quiznos sandwich had been a smarter choice for lunch and clocked in at seven points. I frowned at the screen; I was left with only three points for the rest of the day. Sighing, I saved my food intake points and gathered the carcass in the sandwich wrapper, tossing it in the trash bin under my desk. I'm sure whatever surprise Dave had planned for me later was going to involve eating something. So I was probably going to have to dip into my Flex Points for the week to get through the day.

It was almost 2 PM. I sent a longing gaze at my office phone; I'd already left two messages for Dave, hoping to nail down more exact plans about what we were doing later, but he'd never called back. Calling a third time just seemed desperate and sad.

I pulled out my makeup bag and squinted critically at my reflection. The circles under my eyes weren't going anywhere, and I was definitely showing a little fraying around the edges. I worked long hours, and couldn't keep up with all the maintenance LA required. I might have to start seriously thinking about the whole injection thing. Thank God I had my mother's full lips, the one thing I was thankful to have inherited from her. No collagen needed there. They say you should really think about starting all of the fillers young. Some actresses were starting to go for Botox in their early twenties.

"Damn those little bitches," I said to my reflection. I pulled my face back a few inches from my mirror, a much more flattering distance. Those twenty-year-old waifs were ruining it for all of us who weighed over ninety-five pounds. Somehow the new ideal in beauty had become fried fake hair and bad skin, atop a skeletal frame with plastic boobs. I guess the airbrushing helped those girls look somewhat human on their magazine covers. But airbrushing couldn't help any of them with the chronic halitosis from all the bingeing and

W H A C K E D

purging. I'd heard about that dentist in New York who specialized in making new teeth for those bulimic girls who'd had a river of stomach acid eat away their tooth enamel. He had a secret door so his patients could slip in unseen, and he kept a reflexologist on staff to rub his patients' feet while they were being worked on. Fifty grand for a set of perfect new chompers that would rarely eat solid food.

The phone rang. "It's Dani," I said, briskly picking up, hoping it was Dave finally calling me back.

"Hey . . ." It was my friend Lauren. "Why the busy voice?" she asked.

"I've just got a shitload of stuff to do after being gone all week."

"Anything new with the guy?"

"When you say 'the guy' do you mean Dave?"

"Yes, I mean Dave, unless you've found a better guy yet," she replied dryly.

Lauren didn't like Dave. She always called him a "total dick," after something he had said to her at a barbecue at our mutual friend Ina's. Lauren had never fessed up about what he'd said, so I gave up trying to get them to like each other—I just tried to keep them seated far apart whenever we went out together.

"The two of us have both been so busy with work. There's hardly been time to hang out. He said he's got something special planned for us later; a surprise."

"If he really wanted to do something nice for you, he would dig deep and finally come up with an engagement ring," Lauren snarked.

"C'mon, get off the ring stuff. That will come. I'm not in any rush."

"Yeah, right."

"What's with the attitude, girl? Are you having your period?"

"No, but it's been practically two years now that you've been together. I just think he should get off his ass and marry you like a decent guy. He's never going to meet anyone better than you."

"True, true," I admitted. "But right now, since I'm not even sure

JULES ASNER

if I'm going to see him tonight, I don't want to set myself up for a big letdown. I can't start counting on a diamond ring for lunch, ya know?"

"Okay, but if he does step up to the plate, call and let me know."

"I sure will. Now you go back to being on the rag."

"I know I'm being bitchy. Sorry. I have to go interview someone stupid now."

"So that's why you're in such a nasty mood. Are you going to interview a *Housewife* who's *Desperate*?" Lauren was a television reporter for *MoreTV*, a twenty-four-hour cable channel devoted to all things celeb. She'd had the dream gig, flying off to glamorous places like the Cannes Film Festival or interviewing James Bond on the set of his latest film. Recently though, *MoreTV* had shifted its focus from being the "CNN of entertainment news" to chasing celebutards, following around rejects from *American Idol*, and debating which stars from *Desperate Housewives* were feuding. This had not pleased Lauren.

"Yes, I *am* off to see a *Housewife*—we're going to the Dog Park up on Laurel Canyon so she can share one of her passions with me," Lauren replied.

"I bet she'll tell you her dog is her child. Do you want to bet me?"

"That is a bet I won't take," Lauren said. "Call me if you get engaged."

Lauren hung up and I turned back to the mess of my desk.

"Hey, Dani, your mom's on the phone," my assistant Azita called out to me from her desk outside my door. "Do you want her?"

I didn't need my mom's toxic juice spraying all over me on a catch-up day like today. Thank God I'd been on the phone with Lauren and not picked up the second line when it was blinking. "Can you tell her I'm in a meeting, an *emergency* meeting that I'm needed in?" I yelled back.

"Sure, no problem."

The last time I'd made the mistake of picking up my mom's call

W H A C K E D

at work, she'd broadsided me with the latest news about my dad. "Well, you're going to find out sooner or later, so I guess I should let you know that your father is dating a Russian," she'd told me.

"Really? I'd asked. "Is this someone he met from one of his magazines?"

"No, I think they met online. She's one of those women they call a 'Natasha.'"

"Her name is Natasha? Like Boris and Natasha?" I'd asked.

"No, she's like a hooker, I think, but she needs an American man for her green card."

"So Dad's getting married to give this 'Natasha' a green card?"

"I don't know if your father is getting *married* again, but they are very serious," she'd added gravely. "I hear she has a daughter who's around ten or twelve that your father adores."

"Oh my," I'd replied.

"You know, that's around the age you were when we divorced, so I think he has a lot of guilt associated with those feelings of abandoning a girl close to your age."

"Yeah, that's great to hear, Mom." I had stood up from my chair and gazed longingly at the open doorway of my office. "I'm ten minutes late for a meeting, so I've got to run."

"You have to go?" she'd wailed. "But I had some questions about the show that was on last Sunday!"

"Oh, they're waving me in now, Mom, I'll call you over the weekend or something."

"Okay, I love you, Dani."

"Me too," I'd answered, hanging up quickly. Bringing up my dad was a dirty trick. I don't think either of us knew exactly why we weren't speaking—we just stopped, and his hundred-dollar birthday checks had stopped a long time ago.

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JULES ASNER

Thinking of my parents spurred me into the office kitchen in search of some comfort food. I scoped out the fridge to see if there was anything worth eating. Thinking of my Weight Watchers points, I glumly swiped a yogurt someone had left unguarded. Turning to leave, I saw Evil Janet staring at me stonily from the doorway to the kitchen. I called her Evil Janet because she *was* evil, eternally dressed in black, skulking around the office and always eating some sort of mystery food out of yellowed Tupperware containers. Evil Janet was another writer on the show, but she was treated like some sort of visiting dignitary because she used to write on CSI—and not on one of the crappy spin-off CSI shows—but the good one that takes place in Vegas.

Evil Janet had already had two shows on this season with sole writing credit and I'd silently relished it when Steve told her that the episode she'd been working on featuring a child kidnapping was pushed down a week in the schedule to make room for my Marilyn show. I guess necrophilia trumped child abduction. Hee, hee, hee.

"This is my yogurt," I said, my eyes daring her to wrestle the Yoplait container from my grasp. My heart started racing; I was jacked up on enough caffeine that I could totally fight her. Shooting me a dour look, she turned in the doorway and left. I shivered. A few months ago, Azita had told me she'd seen Evil Janet shaking a coffee can in the office kitchen. She then put the coffee can in the back of the freezer and left. Curious, Azita waited until she was gone and then opened up the freezer. Inside the coffee can were some twigs and herbs and three names written on small scraps of paper: my name, Steve Jacobs's, and George W. Bush's. Azita got scared and threw the can away, but she was convinced that Janet was trying to place some sort of spell on us. This totally scared the shit out of me and I tried to give Evil Janet a wide berth when we crossed paths in the halls. I always wondered how I ended up on a short list with George W.

W H A C K E D

I meandered back to my office, carefully trying to avoid my boss. Spying Azita, I mouthed the words to her, "Where's Steve?"

She smiled and mouthed back, "Gone home early for the Jewish holiday."

"Cool." I smiled back.

"Very cool." She parroted.

Knowing I wouldn't have to go all ninja to get out of the office early undetected was a huge relief.

Steve Jacobs could be an exacting boss, but he was also a very nice guy. I'd first met him when he taught a television-writing course at the UCLA Extension, and he gave me my first break four years ago on his bikini jiggle fest *High Tide*. Cheesy, but incredibly successful, it was the top-rated syndicated show in sixty-nine countries, and it made Steve a very rich man. I started by photocopying scripts and quickly worked my way into the writers' room to become a writer's assistant. Being a writer's assistant entailed filling the latte orders, but I also had a chance to learn something. Every day I would take notes of all the script changes and make sure the scripts got out on time to the crew and actors. When I got home (late) I would stay up working on my own scripts, with *Court TV* playing in the background, until I passed out.

Flesh and Bone was my first "official" gig as a staff writer. I was kind of a late bloomer; most of the writers on staff were in their twenties, not "just turned thirty" as I liked to think of myself.

My boyfriend, Dave, was always telling me Steve was being so nice to me and giving me a break to write on the new show because he wanted to get into my pants. Dave was a self-declared expert about this kind of stuff, because as a successful director, he knew "how things worked in this town."

But whatever Steve's motives, I knew I had to make this gig work. I'd been out of town all week until yesterday, visiting with some new FBI show advisers. With so many forensic shows on the air, having

JULES ASNER

these kinds of technical experts in the credits really helped our credibility with viewers. So in the middle of all the craziness of getting the Marilyn show ready, I had to drop everything and go to Quantico to meet with their team of forensic specialists. Around the office, I acted slightly exasperated about the last-minute assignment, but for someone like me who was a little sick in the head when it came to a fascination with crime scenes, the trip was awesome. It was my very own forensic porn.

Being away from Dave had been hard. I was a little addicted to talking to Dave several times a day. Every time I heard the familiar ding of my Crackberry from the bottom of my purse telling me that I had a message waiting, I'd scramble through everything to get it, hoping it was Dave. Last night, I had been so eager to see him when I landed that I thought of driving straight over to his house, but decided I could use the detour home to defunk. It was a good thing I did, because when I got home I found Dave sitting on my couch with a bucket of KFC.

"Hey, baby," he said, smiling. "I missed you so much, and thought you could use a little KFC and some kisses to welcome you home."

"That's sooo sweet of you!" I didn't really like KFC (ten thousand Weight Watchers points) but still, it *was* sweet of him.

But last night our romp in the bedroom began with a soft beginning for him and a softer ending. That was a first. Nothing makes a girl feel worse than not being able to get a guy off. I mean, c'mon, I'm naked and under you, or in this instance on top of you, and you totally lose your boner?

Dave stared up at the ceiling. "I'm sorry, baby, I've just had a lot on my mind with work and everything. . . ."

"It's okay." I tried to brush it off. "I guess we just need to practice more. I won't go out of town so much." I was a little flushed and trying to catch my breath; I'd been working hard to make it happen.

W H A C K E D

Had I gotten too fat on the trip? I hadn't been able to work out and there'd been plenty of pizzas ordered in for lunch at Quantico. Maybe Dave was disgusted with my being a little extra lumpy. Stretched out next to Dave, I pulled the sheet to cover up a bit. I didn't want him to think there was a beached whale lying next to him in bed.

When I reached down to try and arouse him again, he grabbed hold of my hands. "Don't do that!"

His sharp tone took me aback. He held my hands together halfway down his torso. "Just don't."

"Okay, I mean, sorry, I understand you have a lot on your mind."

He rolled onto his side, facing away from me. I felt so hurt and shut out that I just stared at his bare back. I didn't want to cry. I hated crying in front of a guy. I took in deep breaths, in through the nose, out through the mouth, just like in yoga. I wanted to talk more, but after flying all day I was beat. Dave's back to me was his signal that there would be no more conversation about what just happened.

Dave rolled back toward me and pulled me to him. "Don't worry, it's only temporary." He brightened. "Hey, do you think you could kick out of work early tomorrow?"

"Mmm, I've been out all week, and there's so much going on with the Marilyn episode." I traced my finger on his doughy tummy. No six-pack here, but that would be kind of gross. I didn't have a six-pack, so why should I expect someone I was dating to be able to bounce a quarter off his?

Dave grabbed my wandering finger again, holding my wrist still. "Make it work." His hazel eyes were sparkling now. "I have a surprise for you. Something special I've planned for a while."

"Can you give me a hint?"

"Just dress comfortably. I'll pick you up at work. You'll love it, I promise."

He was so adorable that I almost forgot about Mr. Softy. "Okay,

JULES ASNER

I'll make it work. . . ." I said. Then he pulled me toward him for a salty kiss.

Heading back to my office after my yogurt break, I passed a framed cover of *TV Guide* from earlier in the month. "Maggie Black" was the cover story. Haley Caldwell, the actress who played Maggie on *Flesh and Bone*, was posed as provocatively as possible for a TV coroner who was dressed in something she would wear to perform an autopsy. She stared out at me, and with her dark hair and blue eyes, even I had to admit there was a bit of a resemblance between us. I'd already taken a lot of shit when the article came out, because *TV Guide* had taken some behind-the-scenes photos for the story and run a shot of me working with the other writers with the caption "Maggie Black's alter ego?" That probably earned me a couple of extra twigs in Evil Janet's coffee can.

Haley did look great on the cover. The network was always trying to get us to sex her up. We'd get notes like, "Can't she dress a little fleshier?" But there were only so many scenes you could write about finding dead bodies on the beach that would necessitate "Maggie" wearing a tank top on the job.

Haley was a typical actress success story; she had toiled away for years on daytime television, which led to a role as "the best friend" on a hit sitcom. She thought she would forever be designated the best friend, the Rhoda. But then she had a brow lift, full body lipo, a chemical peel, and hair extensions (the best extensions, the kind made from the hair of virgins in India). Haley was her very own episode of *Extreme Makeover*. Her publicist attributed her metamorphosis to her macrobiotic diet and her newfound devotion to Ashtanga Yoga.

Haley was cool, although she had her diva moments; after all, she was a star and this show made millions for the network. We just had to be careful with close-ups right after her regular Botox, collagen, and Restylane injections. The bruises would read on camera for an

W H A C K E D

entire week.

Back at my desk, I started trying to make the normal chaos of my work space not so embarrassing. I thought about calling Dave to see where he was, but restrained myself, because a third call was just plain desperate.

I tried to focus at the computer screen, feeling tired and overwhelmed.

“Hi, princess.” Azita poked her head in the doorway. “Did you see that sick T-shirt of Tommy’s?”

I rolled my eyes. “I know. Sick.”

“Well, besides that . . . Look who I found!” she trumpeted, pulling Dave by the hand into my office.

“Hey, baby. You ready?”

Dave grinned at me from the doorway. Just seeing him there blew me full with pride. I still got that gooey feeling looking at his mop of unruly hair and hazel eyes. His smile lit up his whole face, and I grinned at him like a high school girl meeting up with her football hero crush.

Dave was definitely more established in TV than I was. He had worked as a director on probably a dozen different shows. He also talked about his *work* more than I did at home, which was fine. Someone once told me that all directors had a God complex, so I just kind of let him run at the mouth when he described the complexities of shooting the barrel of a .357 Magnum gun in close-up. I liked it when he came by the office. I had an actual office on a show, which is rare, and I didn’t mind showing it off to him. It was nice for him to see that I was also on my way to being successful.

“So should I leave you two lovebirds alone?” Azita asked.

I loved Azita. You could describe her sense of style as “jailbait.” I’d never seen her in anything but a cheerleader-short miniskirt paired with T-shirts formfitting enough to let you know that under that sheer cotton were real twenty-five-year-old breasts.

JULES ASNER

“And before I forget, I also have the McGuire research and photos for you,” she said, sashaying in front of Dave to put the file on my desk. I didn’t mind her teasing manner—that was Azita. I did mind how Dave glanced down her backside, focused on her pert ass, and lingered there.

Azita could be trouble, but she’d never make a move on, or allow a move from, my man. She was the all-around office superstar—but the sad thing was that she really wanted to be an actress. I knew that next week she was testing to be a series regular on *The Young and the Restless*. Secretly I was hoping she wouldn’t get the gig. I didn’t want to lose her here, and besides my selfish motivations, I wanted more for her than just a photo op in *Us Weekly* of her shopping at Kitson.

“Later, boss lady. Bye, Dave.” She turned and left and Dave turned with her, his eyes still on her ass. Guys have no clue how obvious they are.

Soon enough, Dave settled his attention back on me. “Hey, baby . . . your surprise awaits.” He came around the desk to finally kiss me hello. I knew he was trying to cover his ogling, and closed my eyes for his kiss.

“Yes, I’m ready, but are you sure you don’t want to invite Azita?” I couldn’t help being a little sarcastic.

“Don’t go being like that on such a special day.” Dave’s hands roamed down my back and grabbed onto the back pockets of my new jeans. “Remember, I have a surprise for you.” He kissed me again.

Now I felt bad. “I know. Maybe I just don’t think my ass was ever as tight as hers . . .”

“Your ass is tight. Here, let me feel it,” Dave said, using both hands to give me a hard squeeze.

“Don’t!” I yelped. His squeeze was so sharp it bordered on being a double-handed pinch. I tried to wiggle away.

W H A C K E D

“Um, excuse me, Dani?” Hearing the voice from the doorway, Dave and I sprang apart like a couple of kids caught playing doctor.

“Oh . . . Hey, Rich,” I stammered out.

Rich Pisani’s huge frame filled the doorway. Rich was one of the technical advisers on *Flesh and Bone*. A retired LAPD cop, he was retained by the show for whenever we had a question about real police procedure. Rich mostly kept to himself, and the rumor was that he’d resigned from the force after taking a bullet for someone. Being a consultant was a good gig for him, but I knew he also did security for celebrities, as well as some private-eye work on the side.

“What’s up?” I asked.

Dave, unfazed, turned his attention to the bookcases, choosing to ignore Rich.

Rich hesitated in the doorway, eyeing us warily. “You left me a message that you had some questions for me, about something you’re working on.”

“Oh, shit.” I had totally forgotten that Rich and I had made a plan to meet. I did have a couple of things I wanted to go over with him, but it was for a show several weeks away, and it wasn’t Marilyn-related, so it could wait.

“I’m sorry to blow you off like this, Rich, but I was just headed out,” I said, shooting a glance at Dave, who, after removing his hands from my ass was now shaking a snow globe I had on my desk, captivated by the falling flakes. “Um . . . Rich, this is my boyfriend, Dave.”

“Nice to meet you, Dave,” Rich offered.

“Back at you, man,” Dave answered, barely glancing at Rich.

Embarrassed by Dave’s semi-rudeness, I moved behind my desk and began powering down my laptop. “Rich, are you cool if we do this next week?”

He shrugged. “Sure, if that works for you. I just thought there was some urgency because you were working on deadline.”

JULES ASNER

"I was . . . I mean, I *am* on a deadline, but I just can't today . . . okay?"

I don't know why I felt so awkward. The girls in the office all swooned over Rich. They even had a nickname for him: "Detective McDreamy." Whatever—I didn't see it.

"We can reschedule for next week, Dani. It's no problem." Rich gave Dave that universal nod that all guys exchange. "Nice meeting you, Dave."

"Yeah, bye, man." Dave answered.

Rich smiled at me. "Have a good weekend, Dani. We'll talk next week."

"Thanks, Rich." I turned back to Dave, still absorbed in the snow globe. "Baby, I'm almost ready to go. Let me just collect my things." I started packing more files and my usual junk into my bag.

"So where's the famous Steve Jacobs?" Dave prodded, picking up a crystal skull that was a leftover gag gift from some office party.

"It's quiet this week for the Jewish holidays. I think Steve left early because it's Passover."

"Really?" Dave half laughed. "I didn't know Steve was a Super Jew."

"I don't know if he's a Super Jew either, but come on, it's Hollywood and it's the Jewish holidays. Half the town didn't even come into work this week."

"He's such a dick," he muttered, this time not to me but to the crystal skull.

"No, he's not a dick. He's great. You just don't like him." We'd had this conversation before.

"He's just been great to you because he wants to fuck you."

I stepped around the desk, took the skull out of his hands, and placed it back on the desk. "Could you please cool it with that stuff? Anyone could hear you."

"Well, they would just agree with me that it's true."

W H A C K E D

“So I’m a lousy writer who’s got a gig only because the boss is just biding his time waiting until I’m free, and then he’s going to pounce. That’s Steve’s plan, you think?”

“No, he’s just keeping you around because you’ve got a great ass.” Dave smiled, looking very pleased with himself. He’d somehow managed to check out my assistant’s ass, kind of insult me, and then definitely insult my boss, and now he was back in good with me with the “great ass” comment.

“You are impossible. Let’s get going. I can’t wait for my surprise.”