

IRREBUTTABLE

PRESUMPTION



BY

STANLEY WELLINGTON

FINAL EDITION

IRREBUTTABLE

PRESUMPTION

By

Stanley Wellington

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IRREBUTABLE PRESUMPTION - PROLOGUE

In our world of fickle morals many warn, "... beware of strong convictions - for like a whore they will seduce you to the foulest of deeds - then like a politician convince you of the honor of your intent." This is the harsh truth which slices through Bradley Dalton's soul like the icy fingers of death. This harsh truth leaves him with the horrid echoing of both a would-be-mother and her unborn child's voices forever etched into his being.

As a matter of record Bradley Dalton was once the district attorney of Baltimore City. A more skilled or dedicated lawyer one would be hard pressed to find. The attorney was also a family man. Born the third son in a family of six lovingly bickering siblings he had planned for a big family for himself. The role he held most dear was that of a loving husband to Janet Posey Dalton, now deceased. His former wife - Janet had been born to a large family also and had shared her husband's aspirations for children. How different things may have been for all concerned if their dream had come true. Strong convictions that love lost must serve some purpose drove this man alone to actions he now wishes he could retract.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER ONE

FORMER D.A. BRADLEY DALTON

A wreck of a man sits on a cot in a sleaze bag motel in the worst part of town. It's hard to believe that this man is the former D.A. Bradley Dalton. Leaning over he places his face in the palm of his hands and he weeps. A vision from days passed haunts him still. It is the specter of Sharon Tomlin as she turns to her attorney Barbara Walsh and asks, "What next?" A warm smile from her attorney helps reassure the would-be-mother that it is almost over. "You're free to go home. One of the deputy sheriffs is going to accompany you home where you will have to remain for the next three weeks, but after that the monitor will come off and the nightmare will be behind you," her lawyer explains. The deputies have allowed Bernice, Sharon's mother, to come around the barrier and join her daughter. The two women embrace one another. "Everything is going to be alright from here on out." Bernice promises her daughter.

Extra deputies have entered the court room at Judge Barkham's request. The lawmen clear the courtroom of all except Bernice, Clarice- the friend, the defense and prosecution teams and the defendants. The reporters and spectators have gathered outside on the courthouse steps. They await the exiting principals of this drama. The media especially wants the details behind the last minute dismissal of the charges. As the courthouse doors open the deputies lead the way. Behind them are Sharon and Dr. Harrison. Close behind the defendants are the lawyers, the family and one friend. The reporters stick flashing cameras in their faces and push right pass the officers. They also stick microphones in Sharon's face and scream their questions at her. "Are

FORMER D.A. BRADLEY DALTON

you still going to have an abortion?" How do you think the jury would have ruled?" a barrage of questions keep coming. "My clients have nothing to say at this time," their attorney-Walsh answers.

Pushing the crowd backward is the deputies as Sharon and the others make their way down the courthouse stairs. A villain sees the commotion outside of the courthouse, gets up and runs across the street. Benjamin Torn is now mingling among the reporters and making his way up the courthouse stairs toward Sharon. Protesters with their signs of condemnation or supporters with their signs of support and encouragement rush up the stairs also. The reporters and Benjamin have breached the safety barrier of the deputies. They are now only an arms length away from the would-be-mother. Benjamin pulls a gun from under his jacket. At that moment Walsh spots the scratches, recognizes him then screams. The lawmen and the crowd freeze for the briefest of moments, but that is long enough for the madman to fire two bullets into Sharon's chest. As Bradley watches Sharon falls backwards onto the courthouse stairs. Time seems to slow down. It is as if she is falling in slow motion. Two of the deputies grab Torn and wrestle the gun from his grasp then tosses him to the ground.

The crowd quickly disperses upon hearing the gunshots. Two deputies have Benjamin under control and are placing handcuffs on him. The crowd is being drawn back to the tragic scene. The mother is the first to kneel down next to her daughter. Staring up at her mother Sharon smiles then she closes her eyes. Easing Bernice aside Dr. Harrison takes her place next to Sharon. Their attorney, Barbara Walsh, hollers for someone to call for an ambulance. It is

FORMER D.A. BRADLEY DALTON

then that Harrison places his hand against Sharon's neck. There is no pulse. The doctor looks up at Bradley and shakes his head. No one who was there will ever forget the soul shattering scream which follows. "Nooo! Dear god, noooooo!" is Bernice's unanswered prayer. Like vultures the press hovers around. Some of them even keep taking pictures of the dead woman and her mother.

At this point the deputies are fed up with this feeding frenzy and ushers the press away. The first two deputies have gotten Torn to his feet. By now Bradley has walked over to Torn and stares him in the eyes. There is no sign of humanity there. As those dead eyes stare back at the D.A. defiantly and proudly Benjamin yells out, "One less baby killing bitch!" Grabbing a hold of him by his collar Bradley lets him know, "She had decided to have her child, so the only baby killer here is you." Bradley releases Torn's collar then turns to the deputies. "Take him away," he instructs them.

Even today that distant past scene still haunts him.

CHAPTER 2

A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

Much like a puzzle , life is a joining of diverse images to create a single portrait.

Years before Bradley Dalton is born there are forces in motion which will scar the beauty of the portrait his life is to become.

Miles from Bradley's home town - Baltimore, Maryland, in a small rural town about forty miles south of Memphis, a town named Temper Tennessee, those life changing events unfold.

What seems most true about the quiet town of Temper is that nothing great ever happens here. The flip side of that is that nothing horrible ever happens here either ... least ways, not often enough that one would worry.

This day in Temper there is the sound of children running and laughing. There are noises that one associates with a birthday celebration. And there are reminders of a house filled with love. None of these seem barometers of ill occurrences. Even so, each in its own way contributed to the ill wind which was about to visit the Tomlin household.

The absolute joy of the Tomlin household is an eleven year old named Bernice Tomlin. The young girl is your typical lovely and happy child. Totally carefree Bernice celebrates her eleventh birthday. Nearby, the patriarch of the Tomlin household, Marshal Tomlin, works diligently to make this a very happy occasion for his little princess, as he often calls her.

Marshal is a tree of a man. Standing six feet - six

A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

inches tall and seeming almost as wide as he is tall. He cuts quite a fearsome figure. Although Marshal is a white southern Baptist preacher his sermons resonate with the same soulful tenor as his black counter-parts when he shouts out from his pulpit about the fires of damnation. It is said by many that some of his flock can actually feel the flames. The truth is that this fearsome looking man is as gentle a soul as his figure tells now with arms stretched outward hanging the multi - colored streamers and balloons for his daughter's birthday party.

The sometimes gruff preacher has many friends. Among the men he calls friend is one Clarence Hollins. Gathered in the living room are Clarence, Marshal and their other male friends. As is customary in some small southern towns like Temper the women are all helping out in the kitchen. The impish friend, Clarence, gets up from his seat and grabs Marshal's hand pulling the big man down from his perch. Tugging Marshal toward the nearby couch he admonishes him, "Man ... enough already. Get down and come have a seat." Knowing that Marshal doesn't drink, so winking at the others gathered, the friend teases him, "Enjoy some of this fine corn liquor I made." The preacher is not amused. "I don't mind if you folks have a drink, but you know darn well, Clarence, that I don't imbibe," he rebuffs his friend. The others burst into laughter. Timmy, the peace keeper, who is another one of Marshal's friends speaks, "Don't be such a grouch. Clarence is only teasing you Marshal. " The embarrassed host sits down. He then dips himself a glass of the non-alcoholic punch from a bowl in front of him.

The mood of the party lightens as they all sit each

A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

sharing their fond remembrances of Bernice. The proud father listens to his friends. A smile creases his lips and he thinks, "The only thing missing from these festivities is my beautiful wife, Ellen. As in most families this mom is the fixer of the family. If something is not perfect Ellen strives and often makes it perfect for them. That is why his wife has returned to the grocery store. It seems that the two of them hadn't gotten enough ice cream, not enough to please the birthday girl anyway. Again Marshal smiles because he expects Ellen back soon and that is enough to keep him content ... for the moment.

The joy of the occasion spills out into the front and back yards of the Tomlin home. All of the children are at play. The loudest and the most filled with glee is Bernice. Most of the children pay little attention as the Sheriff's car creeps ever and ever closer to the Tomlin home. Only Bernice and one of her classmates, Bubby Jenkins, notice. They scamper to the fence in order to get a better view of the local hero, Sheriff Jim Tucker. Their sheriff reminds Bernice so much of one of her big screen heroes, John Wayne. Tucker is almost as big a man as her dad. When someone is in trouble it is the sheriff they call on to make it right. The 38 that he wears at his side looks to an eleven year old like a cowboy's six shooter.

Finally the patrol car stops in front of their door. Both kids can't help but notice that Sheriff Tucker cuts anything, but a heroic swab this day. Sitting in the patrol car with his head in his hands he tries hard to compose himself.

To understand why he is sullen you would have to understand the man behind the badge. Jim Tucker isn't

A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

just the Sheriff of Temper County, he tries and succeeds at being a friend to most of its residents. That said, along with his reason for being here easily explains why his heart is heavy.

Eventually, the door to the patrol car opens. The very distraught sheriff exits the car, his head bowed low. Slowly he makes his way pass the children, up the stairs and onto the Tomlin family porch.

A mischievous Bubby decides to have some fun teasing his classmate. Turning to Bernice he begins to chant, "Your daddy is going to jail ... your daddy is going to jail ... your daddy is going to jail." Tucker ignores the children. Without knocking, which is also customary in Temper, the sheriff opens the door and walks right on in. The birthday girl turns to Bubby and warns, "You better stop saying bad things about my daddy or he is gonna talk to god and tell him to make you burn in hell." The girl truly believes her father is able to make good on her terrible threat. The young boy looks around for a grownup to tell. When he can't find any he looks back at his friend and stares in horror. "Aw ... you said a bad word," he accuses. That quickly Sheriff Tucker has been forgotten and the two children return to their taunting and playing.

Meanwhile, inside the Tomlin home, the ominous figure of Jim Tucker looms a threat to the festive mood of the day. One can almost smell the rancid cloud of doom that follows him. For the first time Marshal looks up and spots his friend. The host gets up from his seat, walks over and greets his dear friend with open arms. "Hi, Jim! What a surprise!" Marshal bubbles over with joy. "I thought you said

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you weren't going to be able to make it," he reminds Jim. " I'm still on duty. This isn't a social call," Jim tries to explain. Taking the sheriff's arm Marshal leads him to the couch. "First take a load off of your feet then we can talk and you can take a load off of your mind," the preacher advises his friend. "A blind man can see that you're heavy laden and me being your minister in all, I understand if you need my help to console a wounded lamb." Marshal is quick to try and reassure his friend. " Am I right? " he then questions.

Choking back his tears, but not daring to sit down Jim begins to relate his all so sad news, "I'm sorry Marshal . . ."

At that moment it finally begins to sink in. The sheriff isn't there to see one of their friends. It is his trouble, whatever it is. Marshal's expression changes from one of mere concern to one of total fear. Scared he interrupts the sheriff and asks, " . . . sorry about what?" Closing the small gap in between he and Jim, Marshal looks intently into his friend's eyes, as though those eyes were windows into his soul. Finding no answers in those sullen places he asks his friend, "It isn't that bad . . . is it?" Fighting back his own tears Jim begins to weave a sorrowful tale, "There was an accident down by Old Creek Road. This guy . . . he was from out of town . . . he was speeding around the bend in the road at Old Creek . . . you know how everyone in town slows down there cause they know you can't see . . . Ellen was crossing there." A distraught Marshal grabs Tucker by his collar and pulls them chest to chest. Crying, he pleads with Jim, "What are you trying to say?" he echoes his plea, "What are you trying to say?"

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Sheriff Tucker wraps his arms around his friend as he continues on with his story, " She was dead before the doctor even got there." A horrid screech pierces the veil of gloom which has settled over the Tomlin gathering, "Noooooooo . . .!"

Outside the children are frozen in their tracks after hearing the woeful sound of Marshal's banshee like scream. Some even begin to cry. The women, who had been in the kitchen helping, run in the direction of the scream. All are taken back by the sight of Marshal's wilted form, hanging limply in sheriff Tucker's arms. Needless to say, the festivities were over.

Like some rapacious beast their sorrow consumes the lives of Marshal and Bernice. Though he never says the words she can tell by the way he looks at her at times that he assigns part of the blame to her and the birthday party for her mother's death.

One couldn't help, but notice that the way he felt about his daughter isn't the only thing that changes in Marshal's life. Before his wife's death he seldom preached of hellfire and damnation. Now the theme has become a staple of his Sunday morning sermons.

Most of his daughter's friends are now too frightened of him to visit the Tomlin home. All the better is this newfound solitude the once gregarious man now tells himself. Seldom is Bernice allowed far from her father's ever protective eye. Life seems Bernice's prison and her father, the jailer.

As is the nature of life as time passes things in the small town of Temper begin to change dramatically for everyone. The factory, which has

A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

sustained the small community, lays off many workers then shortly afterward it closes altogether. There simply isn't enough work to keep this town flourishing. Like water trickling through a hole in a cracked dam the people of Temple began to leave. As is to be expected it becomes harder and harder for Marshal to keep his church doors open.

One Sunday morning during his service the preacher looks warily out over his dwindling flock, they number only twelve by now, then in an instance he realizes and announces to those gathered that he and Bernice will have to be leaving soon. There are plenty of tears cried by all that day.

Even though Bernice is very disheartened about leaving her few remaining friends and has quite a few fears about the prospects of living in the big city, she is also hopeful that this move will be a tonic for her father's soul and bring the loving parent she had once known back to her once more.

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CHAPTER 3
ENTER THE SERPENT

With very little money and their few worldly possessions tied down in the back of Marshal's truck the father and daughter make the arduous trek to Baltimore. Once there he rents them an apartment over top of a store front in which to live. The store front becomes his new church.

In the beginning they struggle by on Marshal's savings, but he is a powerful preacher - speaker and it doesn't take long for him to fill the seats of his small church. The word rings out from his pulpit five days a week twice a day each of the days he holds service. Miss Annie, a woman of considerable years and who always has on a flowery dress and big hat, has left her previous congregation to join Marshal's church because she feels the magic of Marshal's gift when he speaks. With Miss Annie comes half of the other church elders and four generations of the Logan family, including a playboy like grandson named Steven.

Unfortunately for Bernice the success of the church did nothing to mend her father's broken heart. The wound of his wife's death cut too deep.

The years creep slowly by for Bernice. It becomes harder and harder for her to remember her mother or the wonderful love the three of them had once shared.

For a time after his wife's death the straight laced preacher had sought solace in the bottle. It was during this time and while in a drunken rage that he had burnt the last remnants of his wife's memory, family pictures. It was all she could do not to cry

each and every time Bernice recalls his very cruel and thoughtless act. She is sure the destruction of those photos marked the end of all hope of them ever recapturing what they had once shared. The young girl seems so like a fragile flower-never watered and in need of nurturing or surely to die - a death of the spirit, if not the flesh.

As Marshal watches his young daughter become a young woman he wishes that he could stop the sands of time from falling. For Marshal too quickly the flower has blossomed into a beautiful young woman of seventeen. At this age most of the young ladies Bernice knows are already dating. The wary father refuses her even this small concession. Punishing her or protecting her? At this point not even Marshal knows for sure.

The father and daughter's lives are far from Eden. Nevertheless, a serpent, the young man, Steven, does enter. There's no doubt a more handsome or more charming rascal you were not likely to meet anywhere. Marshal is beguiled by the young man from the right kind of family, with seemingly impeccable manners, who dresses more like a successful businessman than a college sophomore. Even though Steven is two years older than Bernice the ever protective father gives them his blessing to date.

Not since her mother's death had anyone shown Bernice this much kindness or attention. For the first time in years she found herself laughing again. It is even amusing to her when Steven would claim to believe her name was pretty. Bernice had always thought her name ugly or at best too plain. The movies Steven took her to see, the amusement parks, even going for a simple walk, each and all of these things were simply overwhelming to the too long

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sheltered Bernice. The young woman feels as though she is a princess who has been held captive in a tower by some cruel ogre, but now her prince charming has finally come to rescue her. For her, all that is left is the hope of marrying Steven and living happily ever after. That is not meant to be.

It is near the end of the summer of her eighteenth birthday when her father decides the church should sponsor a hayride - picnic. The event is held a few miles outside of Baltimore at the Mallin Dairy Farms.

There are rolling green hillsides for as far as anyone can see, a small, but beautiful lake, farm animals of almost every type and there are numerous barns scattered over the great expanse of the farm. It is the perfect setting for two lovers to get lost and here they often do.

Those who didn't care for the idea of picking hay from out of their clothes and hair at the end of the day passed on the hayride and take their picnic baskets and hike off to be alone. Steven and Bernice choose the latter.

Under the warmth of the golden sun the couple walk hand in hand. Hanging from Steven's arm is a picnic basket which holds quite a few treats and a forbidden surprise. The conniving villain constantly looks back over his shoulder. This scheming scoundrel is hoping to find a spot away from the others where he can put his dastardly plot into action.

Finally, he is satisfied that they have wandered out of the view of any prying eyes. They settle atop a

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grassy knoll, far from the main farm house. If not for a few menacing clouds it would have been an ideal setting for a picnic. Just a few feet away a young colt gallops across a field, a mother duck leads her three little ducklings toward the lake and one can hear birds singing and smell the redolent flowers in bloom.

Unabashedly filled with joy Bernice stretches out on the blanket which Steven has spread out. Steven wildly plops down beside her. Reaching out he plucks some wild flowers and hands them to the swooning Bernice. Smiling, she leans over and attempts to kiss him on the cheek. Turning his head quickly her kiss falls upon his lips instead. The two of them laugh like they were ten years old. After the laughter ends the flirtatious boy pulls his girlfriend closer and kisses her more fervently. Pulling away from the second kiss she clears her throat. Flustered she reaches for the picnic basket. The timid young lady starts taking things out and making herself busy with the place settings. The rascal sneaks around behind her, wraps his arms around her and pulls her close. Laughing all so nervously she pries his hands and arms loose and scolds him, "Someone might see us and tell my father then I wouldn't be allowed to see you anymore." A frowning Steven reluctantly slides away, but only to bide his time.

Ravenously Steven consumes his food. After they have eaten he makes idle chatter for a time then reaches around Bernice for the picnic basket. "Close your eyes," he tells her. A wary Bernice watches him suspiciously through half opened eyes. "Then I guess you don't want to find out what kind of surprise it is that I have for you." He plays on her curiosity.

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Hesitantly she closes her eyes completely. Giddy with anticipation Bernice fidgets with her eyes closed. The scamp, Steven, reaches into a hidden compartment of the basket and pulls out a bottle of wine. "Now?" Bernice asks impatiently. Quickly he takes out the crystal glasses, the bottle of wine and a cork screw. After opening the bottle of wine he pours the amber liquid into first one glass then the other. Finally Steven answers Bernice, "Okay, you can open them now." The young girl is horrified by the sight which greets her.

"My father would kill both you and me if he knew that you had brought this with you," she assures him. "I won't tell if you don't," he answers all too glibly to please Bernice. "It's not a joke!" she screams at him. "I'm sorry. I wasn't making light of you. I just don't see what the big deal is. We're alone. I'm twenty, you're now eighteen. We aren't children." Steven's words have the desired affect, Bernice's demeanor softens.

"I guess what you're saying is true. A little wine won't hurt us," she concedes. Taking one of the glasses from Steven she sips the wine. A smile crosses her lips. "I like it. It tastes kind of sweet," Bernice comments- wanting to sound like an adult. The young girl stares apprehensively at Steven, who has yet to drink any of the wine. Picking up his glass he clinks it against hers. A little of the wine spills from each glass onto the blanket. The teenagers laugh then gulp down their glasses contents. Quickly Steven fills them again. Bernice sips from the second glass of wine. There is a warm fog enveloping her mind and dulling first her inhibitions then her common sense.

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Like two mischievous kids they laugh and drink more and more of the potent potion. Swiftly they empty their glasses then Steven fills them again. Laughing, Bernice grabs his hand and looks into his eyes. "You aren't trying to get me drunk, are you?" she asks of him, suspecting mischief, but no longer really caring. "I would never stoop so low. I am a gentleman and a scholar." The impish villain half jokingly assures her. Releasing her hold on his hand she allows him to pour more of the wine. Repeatedly the glasses are filled. Again and again the two gulp down the contents until the bottle is emptied.

A bit wobbly from all she has drank she topples over while reaching for the bottle once more. The two laugh. Sitting up she tries to pour another glass. "Why it's all gone. I can't believe we drank it all," Bernice states, amazed. The brash youth points to a line of ants that march by their blanket. "I think they stole our wine," Steven kids. A giddy Bernice vigorously shakes her head up and down in agreement. The two of them wrap their arms around one another and laugh heartily. When the laughter stops Steven looks amorously into Bernice's eyes. They kiss.

Luck seems to favor Bernice. A sudden storm cools hot passions. Hurriedly they pack their possessions away and run in search of shelter to the nearest barn.

Both are soaked to the bone. They enter the barn and close the barn doors after themselves. They stand frozen in time as they realize that they are totally alone together for the first time. Slivers of day light peek through the cracks in the barn providing only enough light for them to see their surroundings

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and each other clearly. He puts the basket down, reaches inside and takes out their blanket. After spreading it out upon the barn floor he then stretches out languidly onto the blanket. Nervously Bernice stands over him. She looks down at him. "Are you going to just stand there?" Steven wonders aloud.

The naive girl lays down beside him on the blanket. It is then that the wine begins to blur her sense of reason. It is also at that moment that Steven chooses to kiss her again. This time she feels sensations like nothing she has ever felt or imagined before. His tongue urges her lips apart. Bernice moans. This spurs him on. The young man becomes bolder. Awkwardly he blazes a trail down her neck, licking. To the virginal Bernice his fumbling moves seem that of a skilled lover. Trickles of electricity seem to dance through her body. Busily Steven's hands work at the buttons to her blouse then pulls the blouse from her skirt. A panicking Bernice pulls away from him. "I love you." Steven pleads. "I would never do anything to hurt you," he soothingly reassures her. Gently he pulls her closer again. Easing her bra away from the mounds it holds he tenderly kisses the top of her breasts. A part of Bernice knows that she should stop him now, but a larger part of her wants to show Steven how much she cares for him.

While she puzzles over her dilemma he uses the opportunity to roll on top of her. Admittedly his weight feels intoxicating to her. The silence of the barn is broken by a queer sound, the sound of a zipper being pulled down. This causes Bernice to pause once more. "What should I do?" she asks herself as Steven spreads her legs apart then climbs

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in between them. One thing she did know, she had to decide soon. Should she give herself to him or not? Her skirt is being pushed above her waist. There is Steven's hand against her thigh. Do you love him? One bare breast is being kissed and suckled. A moan escapes her lips. Her panties are being brushed to the side. Then she feels him. First against her thigh and then against the lips of her most private portal. His lips move away from her breast and he whispers into her ear, "I love you," then he returns his lips to that soft mound. And then it happens. He begins to enter her. The probing of her tight entrance is difficult and uncomfortable for her. The more of himself Steven urges into her the less control he has. Inexperienced he begins to move too powerfully and too quickly. Moving her hands to his chest Bernice tries to push him away, but to no avail. "Steven !" she cries out. At that moment he pierces her maidenhead. The pain is excruciating for her. Pushing hard against Steven's chest she cries out, "Steven, no ... stop ... it hurts," her pleas falls upon deaf ears. The rutting young man continues to thrust up and down. "It'll start to feel good to you soon," the cad promises. He moves his hips more and more urgently between her legs. To Bernice's surprise just as he had predicted, first the pain begins to subside then her pain is replaced with a quiet pleasure and then that is replaced with a warm enveloping pleasure, but what comes next is almost more then the young woman can bear, that is replaced with the raging all consuming fires of passion. Now it is Bernice's hips which move upward more urgently. So vigorous in her motions is she that she almost unseats her young lover. Her arms snake about his body and hugs him ever so tightly against her quivering mass. With passions hunger her lips explore each inch of his

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face. The barn is filled with the sounds of these two enthralled lovers.

Tears of joy come to Bernice's eyes when she feels his essence bathe her inner walls. Her body is wracked with pleasure as she spends again and again.

After it is over the lovers can do little, but roll over onto their sides and flop apart, exhausted.

The sound of the rain that pitter-patters against the barn's walls is subsiding almost directly in relationship to the ebbing of their passions. It is Bernice who returns to a state of reason first. Sitting up she turns to face Steven. "The rain has stopped. We have to get back. My father probably has people out searching for us right now!" she warns.

Quickly they begin to get themselves and their things together as best their shattered wits will allow. Once everything is gathered up they leave the barn and head back to the main farmhouse.

At the main farm house of the Mallin Farm Marshal paces back and forth anxiously. It has been over three hours since any of the others have seen the couple. "Had something happened to them during the storm?" he wonders. Irene, a woman about his age, who also attends his church, walks and talks with Marshal, doing her best to reassure him.

As he reflects back on the last few years he has to admit that he hasn't been much of a father. "If she's alright I'll change." He promises himself. Suddenly at the top of the hill the two lovers appear to Marshal and Irene. The two adults sigh relieved. The father's face lights up with delight.

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One wouldn't know it from his actions, but the only thing that has kept Marshal going since Ellen's death is having Bernice in his life.

As the guilty twosome come closer Marshal and Irene notice how disheveled the lovers are and understand what they have been doing. Diplomatically Irene makes her excuses and leaves them alone. The suspicious Marshal gives the couple a look of scorn.

The daughter's head is bowed in shame. The guilty young man avoids looking the father in his eyes. The look on Marshal's face softens some when he realizes what is most important is that his daughter is unharmed. Since there is little else he can do the beleaguered father chooses to believe that his suspicions are wrong, that the young man and Bernice have not violated the trust he has given them.

Making her excuses, Bernice speaks for the first time, "We were picnicking on the other side of the farm when the rains came. We got soaked before we could reach the nearest barn, but we did take shelter until the storm had passed."

Without saying a word Marshal points to the bus upon which the other members of the church have already boarded. Taking each other's hand the two board the bus side by side. There is pointing and whispering, but no one says out loud what all of the church is thinking.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 4
THE FROG

Young, impetuous and alive to their awakening passions there is no getting the genie back into the bottle now that they have known the incredible sensations that accompany young love.

The two steal away again and again to be alone. They make love in Steven's car, in the closet of the Tomlin apartment, under the bleachers of the local high school, anywhere and everywhere they can find to be alone.

The two young adults are surprisingly naive for their ages. Recklessly they forge ahead not taking any precautions. It is almost funny how surprised Bernice is when she realizes that she is pregnant. "What would she do?" Schizophrenic is her reaction. Torn between the joyous dream of marrying Steven and having their child and the absolute terror of having to tell her father that she is pregnant - outside of wedlock. Procrastination is the road she chooses to walk, telling no one.

The game of silence that Bernice is playing may have gone on until her pregnancy had become apparent if not for her bouts of morning sickness. One morning when Bernice and Steven are skipping classes to be together, Bernice lays with her head in his lap. Suddenly the skittish girl jumps up and runs to the bathroom slamming the door shut behind herself. Alarmed, Steven jumps up and follows her. Nervously he stands outside the bathroom door cracking his knuckles and listening. There is only the sound of Bernice as she heaves and heaves again coming from the bathroom. "Are you alright ? " Steven inquires. First there is silence then more of the heaving then

THE FROG

silence again then finally the bathroom door creaks slowly open. " What's wrong? " Steven asks, truly concerned. Tears begin to flow from Bernice's eyes. Moving closer to Steven she hugs him tightly. "I'm pregnant ! " she blurts it out.

The frightened young man pulls away from Bernice. His terror is evident upon his face. Bernice is bewildered by his reaction. "Oh god," he bemoans their predicament. Frazzled he paces back and forth hoping to find a solution. Watching him Bernice hopes for some sign of what he might be thinking. At last he reveals his true self, the frog, not a prince. "I have two more years of college ahead of me. I can't afford a baby and go to college. What kind of job can I get if I don't finish college? " he rambles on. "How could this happen?" he asks accusingly.

"You're kidding? You must be kidding," she retorts. "You know what I mean, weren't you taking the pill or something?" he cross examines her. Now it is Bernice's turn to lose her patience. She yells at him, "... Now you ask! I was a virgin! You were the so called experienced one. Or have you forgotten that too?" In an empty show of concern Steven walks over to Bernice and wraps his arms around her. "I'm sorry. This whole thing has caught me off guard." He eases her an arm's length away and looks into her eyes.

Convinced of his concern Bernice asks him, "What are we going to do?" The coward turns away from her, not wanting to face her as he lays out his solution. " I know a guy who knows a lady who can take care of this for us." Her lips trembling with anger Bernice asks, already knowing the answer, "Take care of this

THE FROG

how?" Coldly Steven replies, "An abortion of course."

All hell breaks loose in the small apartment. The irate girl flails her arms at him, grabs and throws things at him; books, tools even smashing glasses, vases and anything else that isn't nailed down at him and against the walls when she misses. Hysterical she screams at him, "Get out of my house!" Pushing him toward the front door she continues to yell, "You're a monster! You don't love me! You were just using me!" Steven tries to convince Bernice that he is just being logical. "Just think about it. After I finish school we can get married and have plenty of kids, but right now having this baby would be a terrible mistake."

Shaking her head vigorously Bernice will not be conned again. In frustration she opens the front door and shoves Steven out of her home. The door closes behind him. The defeated young woman falls to her knees and weeps.

That is the last time she sees Steven until years later. Frightened of the unwanted responsibility, he transfers from the college that he is attending and moves away.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 5
THE GIFT

After not hearing from Steven for a time Bernice realizes that he is gone for good. Once she comes to that realization she knows that she will have to seek her father's counsel.

The table at the Tomlin apartment is already set when Marshal arrives home from his evening service. Bernice has prepared his favorites. Although dinner seems a delightful surprise to him, Marshal is sure that there is more to this. His daughter's demeanor betrays a hidden agenda.

Sitting at their kitchen table Bernice's head is hung low. It hasn't escaped Marshal's attention that Steven hasn't been to any church services in the last few weeks nor has he been to the house during that same period of time. A lover's quarrel that they will soon be able to settle and mend, Marshal has concluded. Still, he wants to be there for his daughter. He truly wants with all of his heart for things to get back to the way that they were between them before his wife died.

The father walks over to his daughter and places his arms around her waist. "What's wrong, sweetheart?" he asks. "I did a bad thing," Bernice begins her confession. Uncharacteristic of the changed man, Marshal lifts his little girl into the air. Looking into her eyes he asks, "How bad could it be ?You're my little princess. " It has been a very long, long time since her father has called her by that term of endearment. Hugging her father very close she cries in his arms. "Am I still your little princess?" she asks, unsure. "Still my darling and always," her father states resolutely.

THE FROG

Silently the two of them stand there. Each holding onto the other ever so tightly. Each afraid to speak for fear of losing that moment forever. As it turned out they were right to be afraid. Speaking in a whisper she says, "I'm pregnant." A tremor of anger shakes Marshal. Gently he eases his daughter away because he is fearful of what he may do if he doesn't. The look he gives her could have frozen a bird in flight. His voice strikes out like a cat of nine-tails, "A harlot! In my house! Thank god your mother is dead and can't witness your shame." Tears flow from Bernice's eyes like a waterfall, but quickly she composes herself. Tired of the role of the victim for the first time in her life she stands up to her father "I am not a harlot!" she screams at him. "I was surely a fool to love and trust someone like him, but I was never a whore!" she insists.

The father is unmoved by her words. Marshal admonishes her, "You must know that what you did was wrong. If you don't know that and repent of your sins then you'll burn in hell, girl!" Marshal throws up his arms and bellows again, "You'll burn in hell!" Tired and beaten Bernice speaks to her father quietly and without emotion, "I didn't come to you for a sermon. You're my father. Now more than ever I need your guidance. Steven says that I should have an abortion. He figures it's the only reasonable thing for us to do." Raging mad, Marshal curses the boy, "That damned evil boy. First he seduces you to the sin of fornication now worst yet he wants to seduce you into murdering your own child!" The father sits down with his head in his hands. The preacher looks up at his daughter. "Is this what I've taught you? Haven't you learned anything in my church?" he asks Bernice. She places her hand with

THE FROG

loving tenderness upon her father's cheek. Marshal slaps her hand away and bounds to his feet. "You are going to have this child. You will repent of these evil thoughts and deeds. If you do not just as sure as we stand here today you will regret it when you stand before the Lord on Judgment Day," he predicts. Suddenly, it is as though Bernice has been transported back in time. Once again she is that eleven year old girl who believes in the unmerciful wrath of her father and God.

Shaking with the fear of condemnation she pleads with her father to help her and forgive her. Filled with religious fervor, Marshal declares to his daughter, "It's not me you should be asking those things. Ask god." Then like a man possessed he falls to his knees, his hands together and begins to pray. All Bernice can think to do is to follow her father's example. Falling to her knees she prays.

In the days that followed Bernice finds herself constantly reflecting back upon her father's words and attitudes and she discovers that she isn't that eleven year old little girl anymore. She doesn't believe as she is told. This maturing young woman finds that she resents being made to feel like a whore.

Even though she is filled with the fear of acquired convictions she no longer has the faith. Soon she stops going to church altogether. It is probably for the best. With each passing day her stomach becomes rounder and fuller. When people in church inquire about his daughter Marshal tells them she has gone to live with her aunt and uncle in Boston. His excuse is that he felt like Bernice was in need of a woman's guidance at this point in her life.

THE FROG

Too often people perceive life to be as they would have it to be rather than as it truly is. To a deluded Marshal everything seems to be working out as fine as can be expected under the circumstances, but for a resentful Bernice the recriminations got to be more than she can bear, so she left.

It is surprisingly easy for Bernice to find a place to stay and a job working as a waitress in Vermont. The determined young woman works right up to the day that she delivers her daughter, Sharon.

When the nurse hands the little bundle to the new mom, Bernice, gazes down into those beautiful blue eyes and she thinks -Thank god for a slime ball like Steven and a fool like her father. Without them there was always the chance that she would have missed out on this very precious gift.

In time she would go back and face her father and Steven, but for now, all Bernice wants is to enjoy her little princess.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 6
REMEMBERING

Years later, Bradley Dalton finds himself alone in his dark dank room. It seems that memories are all he has left of any value now.

A now solitary man remembers a beautiful Indian Summer's day in Baltimore. If not for a cascade of a rainbow of colored leaves being blown about by the slightest of breezes one may have believed it was early June instead of the second week of November. Dressed in an Oriole's baseball cap, a sport's shirt, shorts and sneakers a mischievous boy pedals along the walk way of this middle-classed urban neighborhood. Behind him his frantic mother hurries to catch up. The mother pleads with the boy to slow down. From the other direction an old man comes cloaked in a coat too heavy for this pleasant warm spell. The old man tugs on his gray, wrinkled face boxer's leash. The dog yelps and the old man leaps aside as the boy almost runs them down. The scamp laughs and speeds on. The poor mother apologizes profusely to the old man as she passes him and his dog. Mumbling obscenities, the old man shakes his head in disapproval. All of this Bradley Dalton views from his living room window as he holds his drapes slightly open.

The handsome Baltimore lawyer remembers the drapes slipping from his fingers then walking away from the window. Smiling, he makes his way around the couch then stands over his beautiful, pregnant wife Janet. Drinking in the vision of this pristine creature, whom he loves so much, he thinks about her pregnancy and the three who hurried by his home. "This, my boy, is what life is all about, continuation, ... one generation follows the one before," he had told

REMEMBERING

himself all so long ago.

At that moment in time Bradley was so happy that he was quite sure that he literally glowed from it.

An aching soul reminds him of leaning down and kissing Janet's forehead. That memory evokes still another memory, one where Janet first walks into his life. A now so infrequent smile reminds him that she had actually rode into his life not walked.

Only an hour has passed since school had let out. Bradley and his childhood friends, Gil and Robert have left thoughts of school and home assignments long behind them. They are fourteen year old boys who are naturally more concerned with girls than school.

Gil, the rascal of the group, has convinced his friends to put off doing their home assignments and go with him over to the Carver High School track. He assures them that girls hang out there after school eyeing jocks. Robert, the cautious one, wants to know why should they waste their time on girls who are there to pick up other guys. "It's simple ... "Gil starts to explain , "... the jocks are preoccupied with their practice so that gives us a chance to talk to the girls first. Girls who want to date jocks are usually easy ..." Bradley jumps in, "... even Robert should be able to score." Bradley and Gil laugh. Robert frowns.

When they reach the Carver High School campus, showing off as usual, Gil jumps over the three foot fence which separates the Carver track from the rest of the campus. Considerably more reserve and laid back are Robert and Bradley. They walk down to the

REMEMBERING

opening in the fence then make their way down onto the track.

A big smile beams on all three of the boy's faces when they spot three pretty young girls sitting without escorts looking out from the bleachers that overlook the track. It is their good fortune that practices have been canceled. There is no one to compete with for the girls attentions.

One of the girls , Maria , smiles at Bradley and crooks her finger , signaling for him to come over to her. Maria's friends, Alicia and Debbie, giggle as they watch the forward young girl flirt with the unknown boy. Always the instigators, Gil and Robert push Bradley up the stairs toward the bleachers, toward Maria while laughing and urging him on. It feels as though an eternity has passed since he started to cross the short distance in between them, but here he stands beside Maria smiling down at her. Coquettishly, Maria pats a spot beside herself. Feigning confidence Bradley sits down beside her. "I see you around school a lot ..." Maria lies, wanting to break the ice. Meanwhile the brutish louts, Robert and Gil, shove by Maria and Bradley then rudely squeeze in between Alicia and Debbie. The three girls grimace at them. Not wanting to be lumped in with his friends Bradley shrugs his shoulders, but only agreeing mildly with the girls disapproval.

Taking Bradley's hand Maria pulls him up from his seat and down toward the track. The friends - Alicia and Debbie get up and follow their friend. Not wanting to be left out Gil and Robert follow close behind the two girls.

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It didn't seem important to Bradley at the time, but as the group reaches the track level there are three very young girls about to enter Carver's track at the far end of the field on their bikes.

As the three younger girls enter the field one of the girls, Sheila, is the first to notice Bradley. Pointing to him Sheila alerts Bonnie and Janet. Her reason for having noticed him is that Janet had earlier confided in her friends that she had a crush on the older boy. Seeing Bradley unnerves Janet, so she turns her bike around to leave. Only the firm grasp of Sheila's hand around her wrist stops her. "He has no idea that you like him, but if you run away every time you see him it won't take him long to figure it out," Sheila warns her friend. Just as quickly as she had decided to leave Janet has flip flopped and is now determined to be brave and stay. "Besides he may like you too," Sheila offers a small glimmer of hope to her friend. "I think he's too old!" Bonnie retorts without thinking. Smiling, Sheila tells them of a girl who is going out with a boy six years older than she is. What she fails to tell them is that the girl is eighteen and the so called boy is twenty - four. "I don't know ..." Janet begins as she turns to Bonnie and Sheila, "... my mother would have a fit if she knew that I liked boys at all, nevertheless, one who is four years older. Laughing, the devilish Sheila pedals quickly away. Looking back over her shoulder Sheila shouts to them, "Then we'll let him know and make sure that your mom doesn't find out."

Warily Bonnie looks at Janet. "Oh no! She's going to tell him!" Bonnie warns Janet. A harpy like screech escapes Janet's lips, "Noooo!" her voice beckons to her friend. Unflinching, Sheila only pedals harder

REMEMBERING

and faster toward the three girls and the three boys at the other end of the track. Fighting back her tears Janet rides hard, trying to catch her friend before Sheila can divulge her secret. An apprehensive Bonnie sits still and frightened on her bike back near where they had entered the field.

Maria leans toward Bradley. It is her intention to kiss the shy mystery boy. Before the kiss can be consummated Sheila whizzes by on her bike screaming, "Bradley . . . ! " A bewildered Bradley turns toward the obnoxious little girl. His friends find the situation funny. They fall to the ground laughing. Pointing at their friend they taunt him, "Looks like you have a secret admirer." An annoyed Maria turns away from Bradley and looks to her friends, Alicia and Debbie.

At that moment Janet comes speeding by Bradley and the others. It is then that Sheila calls out her friend's name, " . . . my friend Janet really likes you." Janet's head slumps down upon her bicycle handle bars. The betrayed friend is totally mortified. Heading away from a now enlightened Bradley, Janet swears to herself that she will literally kill her friend.

A few yards ahead of Janet, the imp - Sheila stops when she reaches Bonnie. A glare of outrage over the betrayal beams from the usually passive Bonnie. "How could you do such a thing?" she demands. As angry as a rabid dog is Janet by the time she reaches her friends. She stops beside the traitor. "I hate you ! " Janet declares. " If he doesn't like you there is nothing lost, but if he does . . . " Sheila's words hang in the air.

REMEMBERING

The friends stare at one another for a moment, nod then begin pedaling once again toward Bradley and the others. After all, what did the infatuated young girl have to lose now, the three friends had reasoned.

The older boys and girls stand flustered by the turn of events. Not sure how to react to the young intruders they wait to see what will happen next. It is Gil who is the first to realize that the girls are coming back around to them. "Here comes your little sweetie." Gil teases his friend. It didn't take but a minute for Janet and her friends to reach Bradley and the others. This time the three girls stop. An angry Maria turns to Bradley. "Will you please chase these brats away! Don't let them embarrass us in front of our friends!" she exclaims.

The amorous young boy didn't want to do anything which was going to discourage Maria's flirtations, but he wasn't going to hurt a little girl's feelings just to placate his or Maria's friends. "I'm not embarrassed. She seems nice enough. What's the harm?" Bradley tries to reason with the girl. The fourteen year old girl was not going to be shown up by a ten year old. Tossing her hair Maria marches off in a huff shoving both Gil and Robert aside as she goes by them. After Maria, Alicia and Debbie also shove pass Robert and Gil. It is Alicia who looks back and licks her tongue at the boys.

Amused by the turn of events Gil laughs and shouts after Maria and her friends, "Can we come with you ... after all, he's the pervert, not us. "Gil then spins to face Bradley. "I cannot believe what you just did." Gil states to Bradley in amazement. "Those girls have reputations. Why in the world would

REMEMBERING

you let them get away? Why?"

Janet and her friends all laugh nervously. The laughter stops when Janet timidly speaks, "Hi Bradley. I'm Janet." A childish Gil laughs. Sheila glares at Gil then scolds him, "You're awful silly for your age ... aren't you?" Offended by this, Gil closes the gap between he and Sheila and pushes her as she sits upon her bike. The gallant Bradley pulls Gil away from the girl and her bike. "She's right, you are awful silly for your age," Bradley agrees. A more confident Janet speaks more boldly as she points to her friends, "I'm sorry if they chased your girlfriend away." Bradley smiles and answers her subtle inquiry. "She isn't my girlfriend, but your friend shouting that you liked me did chase her away." An embarrassed Janet stumbles over her words, "Uh ... believe me ... I didn't put her up to it. Just like your friends she can be kind of silly too." Bradley and Janet smile at one another.

The roguish Gil and Robert had gone and huddled a few feet away from Bradley and the three girls. When they exit the huddle they walk closer to the group, each wearing a very mischievous grin. They sing, "Bradley and Janet sitting in a tree k-i-s-s-i-n-g ..." The closest of his two friends to Bradley is Gil, so it is Gil who receives a punch to the shoulder. "Ow! You don't have to beat me up to impress your new girlfriend," Gil mocks his friend. It is then that Janet begins to cry. Hurt by the mean spirited games she pedals away. In defense of her friend Sheila gives Gil one last evil glare then she and Bonnie ride after Janet. Not to be left out of Gil's game of taunting, Robert yells after the girls, "Don't you like your new girlfriend Bradley?"

REMEMBERING

The ever gallant Bradley shouts loud enough to be sure that Janet and her friends can hear, "I like Janet a lot. It's you two clowns I'm no longer sure about." Some of the black gravel stones on the track spray into the air as the tires on Janet's bike screech to a sudden halt. A now lighthearted Janet looks back at Bradley. They smile at one another again. Turning her bike around Janet pedals away once more.

As Bonnie and Sheila catch up to Janet on their bikes the three girls are grinning from ear to ear. The first to say it is Sheila, "He said he likes you!" Bonnie chimed in giddy with delight, "A lot!" Janet is a little more realistic about what just happened. "He doesn't really like me. He's just being nice. Unlike his friends Bradley isn't a creep." Janet explains. "I think he really likes you," Sheila insists. Content that her friend believes that the older boy might really like her Janet pedals away from Carver field with hope for the future.

As Bradley sits remembering he also wonders , "How could the seeds of something so beautiful flower into the foul fruit that his life had become?"

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 7
COMING HOME

It has been eight years since Bernice had left Baltimore. When she looks at her all too quickly growing tike, Sharon, she knows that it is time to go home. Her father and Steven deserve a chance to get to know her daughter. Even more ... she feels Sharon deserves to have a family.

Doubts plague her decision. How would she begin to find her child's father?

As fate would have it the scoundrel dares to return to the scene of his indiscretions. To her surprise when she enters her father's church Steven sits in the front pews of the church. Tiny flickers of the feelings she had once known for this man surface as she walks slowly over to where he sits. Her heart is a flutter as she looks down at him. Finally Steven looks up and sees her. He bounds from his seat. The woman and the young boy, who sit beside him, get up. Bernice looks back and forth between him and the two strangers. "Hi Steven," is all that she can manage to say. A shocked Steven is speechless at first. Finally the flustered fool speaks his first words, "Hello Bernice."

Then he turns toward the very lovely lady who stands next to him. "This is my wife, Wanda ..." He then points to the well dressed and well behaved young four years old boy and continues, "... and my son, Kevin." The hurtful words spew from his lips.

It felt to Bernice as though someone had just hit her in the belly with a cannonball. Nevertheless, there was no way that she was going to give Steven or the church busy bodies the satisfaction of seeing

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her vulnerable. Disguising her hurt with civility she speaks briefly with Steven and Wanda, greets their son then makes her excuses and hurriedly rushes out of the church without seeing her father.

The empty shell of a woman stands outside of the church. Leaning against the building, which she needs for support. All that she can think about is that Steven had married this other woman. Self recriminations made a meal of her, swallowing her whole. Maybe my father was right. Maybe all I ever was to him was a whore to be used and discarded.

The tiny person she had left outside of the church, Sharon, wraps her arms around her mother trying to comfort her. Don't cry mommy. We won't ever come back here again. I'll take care of you," Sharon promises her mother.

Neither mother nor daughter ever return to her father's church. As loving and comforting as Sharon tries to be to her mother it is never enough. Maybe it's understandable that this disgruntled woman looks at her daughter and sees the man who betrayed her. Her daughter's father was the man who made her think of herself as a foolish whore. Maybe there is a more simple truth. Maybe someone can't show love if they've forgotten what it is like to be loved.

In any case it is Sharon who is to bear this unfair cross for most of her very short lifetime.

The little girl, just eight years old, is trying her best to sweep their apartment with a broom that is almost as big as she is. Her chest stands only a little higher than the sink at which she washes dishes. One might be reminded of a "Dicken's" tale

COMING HOME

of childhood woe when watching this frail little girl down upon her knees with a scrub brush cleaning the bathroom floor.

Children are astute. Sharon doesn't know why, but she does know that things are not what they should be between her and her mother, so she struggles to earn her mother's love, yet it is seemingly to no avail.

Though in his daughter's heart Marshal may be the ice ogre- and justifiably so- the reality is that he cares about Bernice. The father has worried himself sick the last eight years. After missing his daughter at his church Marshal is all the more determined to track his daughter down. It turns out to be a fairly simple feat to find Bernice. Calling information he gets her phone number. The father then calls her and talks briefly with his daughter. They makes plans to meet.

The wounded woman is reticent to let her father back into her life, but she knows that she and Sharon each need someone. The father can see the hurt in his daughter eyes. Her pain is reflected in his expression of guilt. Misreading that guilt for disappointment Bernice is unable to let go of the past. In his eyes it seems to her the same disappointment and blame that has haunted her since her mother's death. Real or imagined she isn't willing to go through that again. When Marshal hugs her Bernice makes a feeble attempt to return to him that show of affection. They try to talk to one another, but for Bernice talking with him is like pulling teeth. All he knows to talk about is his church, a subject she cares nothing for anymore. Each time Bernice would change the subject to music

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or books, but then her father would have little to say. Strained and dark is the very air about them, but then like a ray of sunshine Sharon enters the room.

When her grandfather sees her his heart begins to burn brighter than the most fiery star. "Can my eyes be deceiving me?" he wonders. In his granddaughter he sees the spitting image of his dead wife, Ellen.

The stranger stands up and opens his arms toward Sharon. "Come to your grandpa," he pleads. Smiling, Sharon looks to her mother. At last Bernice smiles then nods yes. The girl smiles a great big smile then goes running across the room and jumps up into his arms. The two of them laugh with a joy which they have become all too accustomed to doing without.

The sight of her daughter and father bonding at first fills Bernice's heart with joy, but all too quickly the delight changes to jealousy. "Why didn't he still love her? How did she lose her daughter's love?" Any time her father comes over she refuses to be a part of what they share, no matter how hard the two try to include her. So badly Sharon wants her mother's love, more than anything in the world, but she is more than happy to at long last know that she is loved by someone - her grandfather.

For a brief moment in time Sharon knows love. The next few months pass joyously with Sharon beginning to know what a normal childhood with love is like.

Just after the spring thaw Sharon and her grandfather spend the day at the Baltimore City Zoo. Later that night Sharon sleeps in her room. The toys

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and balloons her grandfather has gotten for her at the zoo surrounds her on her bed. Some are tied to her bed posts. The bed is crowded with the many stuffed toys her grandfather has bought. The young girl almost doesn't fit.

Sharon sleeps through the phone ringing at two in the morning. Soon she is rousted from her sleep by a very distraught Bernice. "Honey, you have to get up." Still half asleep the young girl sits up in her bed. "No mommy. I want to sleep," a crabby Sharon answers then lays back down onto the bed and tries to go back to sleep. Upset and at her patience end for the first and only time in her life Bernice slaps her little girl's legs. "Get up from there! We have to go to the hospital!" she demands. "Ow !" Sharon snaps upright in bed and begins to cry. The anguish filled Bernice takes her daughter into her arms and comforts her. "I'm sorry baby, but we have to go. We have to go now!" Bernice pleads. "What's wrong mommy?" Sharon questions. "Your Grandpa is very sick." The mother explains to her daughter. They hurriedly get ready then leave for the hospital.

A heavy set woman is the charge nurse for the graveyard shift of the cardiac ward. The large woman, Martha, sits thumbing her way through a fashion magazine while Bernice and Sharon stand at the nurse's station desk waiting anxiously for any news of her father's condition. Again Bernice is starting to lose her patience and begins to tap on the desk. The nurse looks up and sees Bernice and her daughter. The annoyed woman gets up from her seat and walks up to the desk. Pointing to the young girl the nurse asks, "How old is she?" Flabbergasted by the woman's gull Bernice has had her fill.

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After sitting there for over fifteen minutes doing nothing she had the nerve to interrogate her about her daughter. "She's nine," Bernice answers rather than create a disturbance. It was only a month before that Sharon had turned nine. "I'm afraid hospital policy says that she has to be at least twelve years old to be on this ward," Martha informs the mother in a snooty tone. That is truly the last straw. Unloading her frustrations on the overweight nurse Bernice gives her a piece of her mind, "You must be out of your damned mind. My father is in there dying. You people can't get me a doctor to explain what's going on, but you can tell me that I can't have my child with me! Get out of my face! The only other thing I want to hear from you for as long as I am here are the words, I have found you a doctor." then Bernice takes Sharon's hand. They sit down. A regret filled Martha recoils from the stinging admonishment then retreats to a corner in the back of the nurse's station.

With tears in her eyes Sharon looks up at her mother and she asks, "Mommy is grandpa going to be alright?" Her mother wraps her arms around Sharon and hugs the girl tightly. "I don't know baby," she answers truthfully. "I guess all we can do is pray. Would you like to go to the chapel and pray?" she offers, not because she any longer believes in the power of prayer, but because she hopes to take Sharon's mind off of the waiting. "Yes mam," Sharon answers.

The two of them get up and head to the hospital chapel. As they pass the nurse's station Bernice tells Martha that if the doctor has any news for them that they will be in the hospital's chapel. They continue on to the chapel without awaiting a reply.

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The hospital chapel is simple , each side has eight rows of pews , there is an altar at the front of the chapel and a single cross adorns the wall above and beyond the altar. There is no one else in there at that hour except the mother and daughter.

Feeling uncomfortable, having not been in any sort of church in such a long time, Bernice stops and has a seat in the last row of pews. It is Sharon who walks all the way up the aisle of the chapel until she reaches the altar. The hopeful girl gets down on her knees and begins to pray. A quiet calm settles over her because Sharon believes that god will make everything alright.

What is there about a church that comforts and fills a person with hope? A hope that like some fleeting specter too often disappoints.

The doors to the chapel open. Marshal's doctor walks in. Walking toward his patient's daughter their eyes meet and he shakes his head, no. Bernice puts her hand up signaling for him to stop. The silence is broken. The doctor speaks, "I'm truly sorry Ms. Tomlin." Hearing the doctor's voice Sharon turns to see him. The girl leaps to her feet and runs down the aisle, stopping in front of the doctor. "Where is my grandpa?" she asks. The doctor puts his hand under Sharon's chin and tells her that her mother will explain everything then he turns and walks away.

Crying, Sharon turns to her mother. "Is grandpa dead?" she wants to know. "Yes he is sweetheart." Bernice answers calmly. "But I prayed mommy. Didn't god hear me?" she wonders. "I don't know baby. Maybe there isn't any god. Maybe all we have is each other

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Maybe he heard you and his answer was no." Bernice tries to explain to a child what an adult has trouble grasping, but Bernice doesn't want to give her little girl false hopes. Besides , after all she has endured she knows that she no longer believes in any god.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 8
IN NEED OF LOVE

For a short time after her father's death Bernice tries to be more affectionate toward her daughter. Unfortunately for Sharon her mother simply no longer has any idea how to demonstrate affection. Soon afterwards things go back to the way they were before Marshal came into their lives.

The daughter tries everything she can to impress her mother, but nothing is ever enough. "Time heals all wounds." It isn't true for everything. It certainly wasn't true for Sharon and her mother's relationship.

A proud sixteen year old Sharon marches into the TV room one day after school. Laid across the couch Bernice watches her soaps, as usual. Wanting her mother's undivided attention Sharon stops in front of the TV set. Bernice tugs at her daughter's dress until the girl is no longer blocking her view. Not to be put off this time the girl jumps back in between her mother and the TV once more. "Would you please get out of my way?" Bernice asks. "You're making me miss my favorite soap," she tells her daughter, annoyed. Still blocking the TV Sharon waves her report card like a banner in front of her mother excitedly. "I got straight A's!" she exclaims. Nonchalantly Bernice takes the report card from her daughter's hand then places it beside herself on the couch. Picking it up Sharon reminds her mother, "Straight A's!" Seemingly unaffected the mother takes the remote and clicks off the television. Getting up Bernice faces her daughter. "I saw them. You aren't the first person to ever get straight A's. Believe it or not I use to get straight A's. Part of your problem is that you study

too much. You'll probably grow up to be one of those nuts who shoots people from a bell tower. Get yourself a boyfriend. That's what you need," Bernice advises her daughter. The icy witch heads for the liquor cabinet.

As usual Sharon takes what Bernice says to heart. The very next day Sharon starts hanging out with the popular girls at school. It isn't long before the

guys take notice and start asking her out.

Like most girls her age Sharon dates her share of winners and losers. Each boy that she dates she parades home like a trophy to display for her mother. No matter how amiable or how good a student or how good a jock each boy may have been Bernice can always find fault with them and that fault is the death nail to each relationship.

One day while at school Sharon sits alone on a wall outside of the cafeteria when she overhears two girls behind her laughing. Being more than a little paranoid Sharon turns to see if somehow she is the brunt of their misplaced humor. It turns out that the girls are just flirting with mister wonderful, Daniel Mathews, the most popular boy at school. And why wouldn't he be? He is a senior, letters in three sports, he is handsome, smart and his parents are rich - filthy, home in the Hamptons rich.

Ignoring the other girls Daniel walks over to where Sharon sits alone. "May I join you?" he asks smiling. The surprised young woman wears an expression of puzzlement, but points to a spot beside her on the wall and says, "As far as I know

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it's a free wall. Anyone can sit here." Daniel ignores the snide remark and sits down. "I honestly believe that you are the only girl on this entire campus who has not once flirted with me, except the gay ones," Daniel kids. "I don't flirt with guys. If they like me, they have to approach me," she says feigning confidence. "I like you. I'm approaching you," Daniel replies. They both smile. "So what's next?" she teases. "We could try going out on a date," Daniel teases her in return. "We could try that," she agrees. They laugh. Taking her hand in his they get up together and walk away.

The romance between Sharon and Daniel seems like something magical to the insecure young lady. They enjoy being with each other more than they had ever thought possible. Unlike the other girls Sharon doesn't care about his cars or money. At first Sharon had thought him a bit vain then she realizes he is just defensive. That she can understand. Because he's rich and popular people are constantly trying to use him.

A happy Sharon thinks about how much her mother would have to be impressed with Daniel, but she realizes that she would be doing the same thing as the users. Besides, it is enough that they like each other. Smartly she decides that she isn't going to risk what they have by putting it to the "bad-mother" test.

It is six months of relationship bliss which she has shared with Daniel before he starts getting truly serious about her. The fact that he hasn't yet met her mother begins to bother Daniel. In his mind he is afraid that it is some sort of reverse "snobism." That Sharon believes that her mother won't like him

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because of the preconceived notions she has about rich people. The young man will not be put off any longer. At this point in their relationship he insists on meeting Bernice.

Hoping to talk him out of this folly she tells him the whole heart wrenching tale of her childhood and warns him that her mother is a hurdle best left not jumped. Not swayed in his determination to get closer to Sharon he still insists on meeting her mother.

The day that Sharon dreads finally comes. Daniel is coming over to her house tonight.

How could she not like Daniel? He's perfect. Sharon's fears begin to wane. The doorbell rings. All of her fears come flooding back. Nervously Sharon opens the door to find Daniel standing there. "It's not too late to run," she half kids him. The goodhearted young man smiles and comes in. "Who is that?" a drunken Bernice calls out from her bedroom. "Daniel. My friend. I told you that he was coming by tonight to meet you," Sharon shouts back. Staggering into the room where the two sweethearts wait Bernice eyes them suspiciously. Looking from one to the other and then back again cruelly she laughs. Surprised and confused by her reaction Daniel asks, "What's so funny Ms. Tomlin?" Bernice tells him exactly what is on her small mind, "At first I wondered what a smart, rich and handsome boy like you would want with my Sharon, but it's so simple, you're screwing my little girl." The room becomes so quiet you could have heard corn growing. The embarrassment is not yet at an end for Sharon. "I doubt if you're the first, but you must have been the best for her to make such a fuss over you." the

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flabbergasted Daniel stares at the mother with an icy glare. "Sharon told me that this was a mistake, but I didn't see how it could possibly matter what you were like. I was wrong. Goodnight Ms. Tomlin," Daniel ended.

Releasing his hold on Sharon's hand he heads straight for the door. Close behind him Sharon follows. Stepping in front of him Sharon opens the door and sees him out. "I'm sorry." It was the last thing Sharon ever said to him. Daniel nods then exits her apartment and her life.

As Sharon closes the door she knows that it is over. Behind her Bernice stands feigning innocence, as if she has no idea what she has done. With crystal clarity Sharon finally begins to understand. It didn't bother her that she wouldn't be going out with Daniel anymore. What bothered her is knowing that her mother either thought very little of her or cared very little about her happiness.

For a while Sharon did everything she could to live down to her mother's expectations, but like a trapped animal that drags itself and the trap along she was only hurting herself. An epiphany occurred to her so she stopped trying to earn her mother's love then began concentrating on learning to love herself. This allowed her to begin to enjoy her life. At least as much as one can absent that thing we all need most ... knowing that we are loved by another.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 9
REUNITED

In time the scared little girl and the brave young hero might have forgotten one another if the fates hadn't brought them together again. One can't help, but wonder how different the portrait of Bradley Dalton's life might have been if not for this ill-fated love.

The roads were icy as Bradley drives home from college. It has snowed then warmed up enough to melt the snow then it became cold once more. The melted snow froze and became ice. All of this makes the already miserable weather conditions unbearable. Despite the horrible conditions Bradley is in the best of spirits. It is holiday break from school. This means that he has two weeks to party and relax with crazy Gil and melancholy Robert before he has to go back and cram for this semester's final exams.

Everyone expected Robert to go to college also, but in their senior year of high school his father died unexpectedly and after medical bills were paid his mother just couldn't afford it.

Now Robert works at the local steel mill and makes reasonably good money. Gil is in between jobs, which somehow seems almost always to be the case, but Gil always knows where the best parties are and doesn't mind sponging off of Robert or whomever else is available and willing.

The three musketeers are together again and all the mothers had better lock up their daughters. That was their personal credo in those days, still in their early twenties.

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Just up the street from Bradley's home three other friends were still together. In Janet's almost always immaculate room she, Sheila and Bonnie had today made a mess of the place. Hair pins, makeup, perfumes, clothing and anything that one can imagine young women needing to prepare for a

big party is strewn about Janet's room. To Janet's horror the bigger breasted friend, Sheila, is holding one of Janet's small bras up to her more than ample chest and laughing. "What is this ... a band-aid? " she kids her friend. Bonnie and Sheila laugh heartily. Disgusted with her friend's joke Janet marches over to her, snatches the bra from her hands and gives her a taste of her own medicine, "Oh no you didn't go there Miss Gigantic Boobs 1989. I bet that Melvin prays that you don't smother him every time you put those humongous things in his face." Standing up Bonnie shakes her head no, trying to signal Janet. Turning around Sheila catches Bonnie. She throws her friend an evil stare. "What's going on?" Janet asks, looking first to Bonnie then to Sheila. "If you must know, Melvin and I broke up earlier today," Sheila admits. "Why didn't anyone tell me?" Janet wants to know. Bonnie jumps in, "Because you always take these things so personally. It's almost as if you were the one being dumped." Sheila glares at Bonnie again. "Or dumping the other person," Bonnie quickly adds.

Now sullen, Janet puts the bra into the drawer that her friend had taken it out of then turns to face the two friends. "I know that I do that . . .," she whines "... but you guys know that I live my love life vicariously through the two of you," she admits. Bonnie's eyebrows arch in disbelief. "I don't

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have a love life. I'm saving myself for marriage," Bonnie wants understood by all. "Not like that, doofus. Boyfriends and going out ... that's all she means," Sheila explains." I do that," Bonnie adds almost whimsically. " You wouldn't have to live vicariously or any other "ly" if you would just take advantage of some of the opportunities that come your way," the friend reminds Janet. "I know why she doesn't ...," the geeky friend, Bonnie, notes. "Everyone knows why ...," Sheila replies, exasperated. "I am over him. I promise." Janet tries to convince her friends. "How can you be over him ... you were never under him," Sheila answers sarcastically. Wearing a frown Bonnie says to Sheila, "How disgusting. You are a slut, is what you are."

Playfully the two go after one another. "A slut ... am I?" Sheila swats at Bonnie while Bonnie hides behind Janet, laughing and mocking Sheila.

"How many has it been this week? Five? Ten? A hundred ?!" Feigning anger she pushes Janet aside, wraps her arms around Bonnie, and pulls her down onto the bed. Pinning her friend's hands over her head, laughing she says, "Say you're sorry!" Sheila repeats herself , " Say you're sorry ! " A giggling Bonnie recants her statement, "I'm sorry!" To Bonnie's surprise Sheila doesn't release her. " Tell me that you want to hump crazy Marvin." Sheila decides to torment her friend. With all the strength she can muster Bonnie pushes Sheila off of her then jumps up arms raised triumphantly." I will never hump crazy Marvin!" she screams.

At that moment the door to Janet's room opens and in walks Janet's mother, Marge Posey. Lowering her arms Bonnie puts her hands over her mouth. Three friends

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stand wearing looks of embarrassment. "I would hope that none of you will hump crazy Marvin," Janet's mother jokingly assures the girls. Mrs. Posey hands Janet a gold bracelet. "You know the rule, the first time you come home without a piece of jewelry that I lend to you is the last time you ask to use my jewelry," she tells her daughter. "Yes mam," Janet smilingly agrees. Her mother then turns and exits the room, closing the door behind herself. As soon as the door closes they all fall on the floor laughing.

Later the same day the girls sit on Janet's bed. They're dressed and ready to go to the party at the local college. Turning to Janet the friend-Sheila wears a solemn expression. "Try to have some fun tonight. Promise me that you won't even think about that Bradley Dalton tonight. Promise!" the friend demands. "I promise you that I will have fun and I will not think of him." Janet agrees. "Liar!" Bonnie accuses. Bonnie turns to Sheila. "You know that she has always been and always will be in love with him." Bonnie reminds her. "Each time he comes home from school she won't even look at another boy until he's gone. She moons and she pines over him and then she tortures any other guy who dares to show her any attention because Bradley didn't notice her," Bonnie rants on. "Am I that bad?" Janet asks. "Worst!" the others chime in together. "Let's change the subject. I don't want to talk about him anymore," Janet insists.

The party at U.M.B.C. is already jumping. The music is blasting. The dance floor is filled with more than two hundred gyrating young adults. Some couples have begun huddling in dark corners, stealing kisses and caresses. The three musketeers, Gil, Bradley and

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Robert aren't doing so well. They stand in a corner of the room together staring out over the party. Gil smiles at one beautiful young woman across the room. She smiles back. Her huge football player boyfriend turns to Gil and glares at him. Choosing the better part of valor, discretion, Gil turns his head from the girl and her boyfriend.

"Man ... is everyone coupled up?" the pessimistic Robert asks. No one answers. The three continue to scope out the room, hoping to find unattached ladies.

The door opens then Janet leads the way into the party followed by Bonnie and Sheila. Bradley notices Janet immediately. Her beauty takes his breath away. Quickly he turns to his friends and asks if they know who she is. Gil and Robert laugh, because they never forgot the three little girls from the Carver track. Nor did they ever let Janet or her friends forget either. "Are you saying that you honestly don't remember ...?" Gil asks, holding back his laughter. Taking another look Bradley then shakes his head no. "I think I would have remembered meeting her," he assures his friends. No longer able to contain himself, Gil bursts into laughter. Jokingly he then puckers his lips at Bradley and mocks him, "Oh Bradley ... I'm on my little bike and I love you so much." Robert and Gil are laughing their heads off. "What are you talking about?" Bradley still doesn't recall. "Our first year of high school we had these three loose babes down on the Carver track then these three little girls come riding up on their bikes and you blow off the whole thing because one of them likes you," is Gil's distorted memory of the event.

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Smiling Bradley finally remembers. "Yeah. She was a sweet kid." Gil snickers. "Well little miss sweet kid has grown up." Gil points to Janet.

Oblivious to the world Janet stares off into space, despite her promise to her friends she is sure that this will be one more party where her friends have a ball and she goes home and pines over Bradley. "I won't do it," she tells herself. It is Bonnie who shakes Janet out of her fog. "What?!" Janet snaps. "He's here! And guess what? His friend is pointing at you!" Bonnie tells her, excited. Slyly Janet looks over toward where her friend is now pointing. Seeing Bradley her heart stands still.

His friends again push Bradley across the room until he stands only an arm's length away from Janet. He smiles. She smiles. "Janet? Isn't it?" he pretends to be unsure. "I'm surprised you remember me." Janet answers, her heart a flutter. "How can I forget the first girl to ever tell me that she likes me?" he replies. They laugh.

"Would you care to dance?" he asks. Without answering she takes his hand. Sheila and Bonnie giggle. "I see that your friends are still kind of silly." Bradley comments. The two girls turn and walk away. Looking across the room Janet spots his friends, who have retreated to a spot where they can spy on him. They point at him and laugh. "I see that your friends are still kind of silly too," she counters. "I guess some things never change." he admits.

They walk out onto the dance floor hand in hand. It is almost as if they're in a dream. Although the room

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room is filled with people they are only aware of each other.

They talk about past relationships, there weren't many for either. They talk about politics and their hopes for the future. They even talk about their favorite foods. Everything is important. Each wants to know all there is to know about the other. The time slips away so quickly. Before they know it Sheila is tapping Janet on her shoulder. Pointing to her watch Sheila informs her friend, "... Eleven o'clock. We have to be back by twelve." The three friends look to Bradley. "I'll be glad to take you home," Bradley volunteers. The two friends smile at one another. " I guess we'll see you tomorrow," Sheila notes then turns and leaves with Bonnie.

The two walk hand in hand across the college campus to Bradley's car. Bradley's hand caresses Janet's hand and she sighs. They stop, turn to each other and kiss for the very first time. All he can think of at that moment is how perfectly Janet fits into his arms and how wonderful her body feels next to his and how sweet and soft are the touch of her lips. He knows then and there that there will never be anyone else for him. An elated Janet thinks, "... at last -and-thank god this is as wonderful as I always knew it would be."

The two of them don't see much of their friends for the remainder of that Thanksgiving break. Every possible moment is spent with one another. They bounce back and forth between each of their family's homes, eating and sharing this special time together.

All too quickly the time passes. Bradley returns to

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school and Janet returns to her studies. They talk on the phone everyday. Anxiously they await the Christmas and semester break, so that they can be together again.

Christmas comes and goes all too soon. The same for Spring break, but then comes May and with it comes finals and prom season. Surprisingly Janet isn't as enthused as she might have been. All she can think of is how fast the time that she and Bradley have together seems to go and that come September it's off to Harvard Law School for him. They are just starting. Can this new relationship endure long separations?

The two sit quietly side by side outside of the Posey family home. By now Bradley can tell when something is bothering Janet. "What's wrong?" he asks. "I'm going to miss you terribly," she answers in a feeble voice. " I'm not going anywhere," he assures her. "I mean in September." she reminds him. "I'm not going to Harvard. I've decided to go downtown to the University of Maryland Law School," he tells her smiling.

Elated, Janet wraps her arms around him and kisses him all over his face. Bradley picks her up and twirls her around in the air. "I love you and I don't ever want to be away from you again." he declares his feelings. "... and I love you Bradley Dalton," Janet returns his declaration of love.

There is little on either of their minds except the planning of Bradley's graduation and Janet's prom now.

Three friends; Sheila, Bonnie and Janet go shopping

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together for prom dresses. The racks are filled with everything from the latest in couture designs to the "Rocky Fashion Horror Show." The girls laugh and joke as they try on some of the most horrible looking dresses they have ever seen, as a joke. They pretend that they don't know that the salesgirl is feeding them a line when she says that they look adorable. When the obnoxious woman turns her back they stick their fingers in their mouths, pretending to gag.

Turning to Janet it is Sheila who ends the kidding about the clothes. Now pretending to be as serious about a different subject she asks, "Who are you going to the prom with ...?" then she and Bonnie laugh. "You can laugh now, but a few months ago I wouldn't have dreamed that this was possible." Janet tries to convince her friends. "Bull! Since the day you first laid eyes on that man you've had him in your sights. He never stood a chance of getting away," Sheila half jokingly states. Taking on a cocky persona Janet goes along with the fun. Janet struts and talks tough, "Girls, when you are right you are right. He's been mine since we chased them three little skanks away from Carver field that day." They all burst out laughing.

The salesgirl is becoming impatient with the three friends. She asks, "Are you going to buy or rent anything?" Janet starts to say something nasty to the girl when she spots the perfect dress. Her mouth gaps open. Sheila, Bonnie, and the salesgirl look in the same direction as Janet. "Wow. That is beautiful," Janet has to admit, mesmerized by the dress. Bonnie turns to her, "You are going to look like an angel in that dress," the friend adoringly assures Janet.

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A few days later nervously Bradley sits in his car, hands clammy and beads of perspiration rolling down his forehead. He searches through the glove compartment until he finds a napkin. Timidly he dries his hands and wipes his brow. It is prom night and he has a date with the girl of his dreams. Hands shaking he fumbles with the car door handle until he opens it. Finally he works up enough courage to exit the car. Knees knocking he makes his way to Janet's front door and knocks. Janet's father, Justine Posey, answers the door. Justine swings his front door open wide. Finding Bradley at his door he calls to his wife, "Look at him Marge!" Mrs. Posey makes her way to the front door. She looks at a very handsome Bradley and smiles. "Him looking like a black James Bond," Janet's father teases Bradley as he leads him into the house. A hush falls over the household. A vision of blinding loveliness seems to be floating down the stairs toward them. Everyone is in stone faced awe. Justine is the first to hug his daughter, then her mother hugs her and even her sisters rush over to hug the prom girl. Still dumbfounded, Bradley finds himself being pushed toward Janet by her oldest sister, Gail. Cameras start to flash. The two cover their eyes. "I want plenty of pictures before my daughter leaves here tonight. After all it won't be long before some boy will take my little girl away from me for good," Justine predicts. Janet's family looks at Bradley. With pleading eyes Janet looks to her mother in silent agony. Smiling her mother lets her know that there is an unspoken agreement that she won't let her father go overboard.

After fifteen minutes of Mr. Posey taking pictures Janet's mother steps in and takes the camera from his hands. "These kids have a prom to go to Justin"

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she tells him firmly. Even though he is reluctant to do so Mr. Posey steps aside. The couple rushes out of the door. Gail tries to snap more pictures, but her father grabs her camera and chases Bradley and Janet all the way to the car, snapping more pictures until the couple finally speeds away.

There are many a beautiful young lady at the prom, but the other guys can't help but turn their heads as Janet enters. The ugly green monster rears its head. The other girls turn up their noses, annoyed. Bradley struts like a proud peacock, because he knows that his lady is the belle of the ball and that they are destined to be reunited for a loving lifetime.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 10
A WORLD GONE MAD

The seventies are a crazy time. Young people are trying weed, speed and any new drug to expand their minds only to find that their prospects for the future shrink. Sexually transmitted diseases are no longer a nuisance, they can kill, but the defining moment of madness is when political games and the drug companies desire to expand their stem cell research as the cash cow of the future brings about the redefining of the meaning of life.

Hundreds of miles away from Baltimore and at least five life times ago a monster had been molded by these insane times. Like most evil he searches for a banner behind which to hide his evil intent.

Benjamin Torn was the son of two abusive drunks. Maybe that is why he has spent most of his life in and out of trouble. At one time or another he has been a member of one extremist group after another. He never stays with any of these groups for long. Despite his corrupt nature Benjamin views himself as a good guy, a crusader. Whenever he can no longer cloak his wrong doing from himself he has to seek a new cause.

Quite by accident Benjamin is passing through the small town of Hillcrest, Idaho when a huge pro-life protest is going on. A beautiful young woman named Abbey Kind rushes over to him shoving flyers into his hands and begging him. "Please. You can't just stand by and allow them to kill our future." Benjamin smiles, takes the leaflets and follows Abbey back to the picket line. It isn't long after this that the two of them introduce themselves to one another. Benjamin and Abbey are walking side by

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by side.

Much like a chameleon, this madman takes on many appearances, including that of a caring concerned human being. The people he talk with among the other pro-lifers are charmed by him, so much so no one notices the warning signs.

Outside of the Hillcrest Family Clinic some of the protesters have begun to use their bodies to peaceably, but physically bar the way of the clients to the clinic. A huge black man, Carter, exits the clinic and approaches the protesters menacingly. The security guard stands nose to nose with Abbey. "I could give a rat's ass if you stay out here 'til doom's day, but don't interfere with people coming into the clinic," he instructs Abbey.

"How can you work here? Why would you assist these people in this horrid thing that they are doing?" Abbey asks. The empathetic man answers in a matter of fact like fashion, "My family has to eat." Another client of the clinic tries to enter. Abbey jumps in front of her. "Please don't go in there. In god's name I beg you please," Abbey pleads with the young woman. Carter literally picks Abbey up into the air and he moves her from in front of the young woman then places her gently to the side. As Abbey watches the young woman enter the clinic she shakes her head and begins to weep then walks away.

Hoping to impress Abbey it is Benjamin who walks over to Carter. The evil villain leans in toward the big man and whispers, " Don't come back here to work tomorrow. If you do I will kill you. If you tell anyone that I threatened you I will deny it then I will still kill you." Benjamin steps back then he

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stares into the guard's eyes. A fear filled Carter blood runs cold. There is not a single trace of humanity in Benjamin's empty soulless eyes.

No one knows what is said, but a victory cheer goes out from the pro-lifers as the frightened security guard walks hurriedly back inside of the clinic.

That same night back at the headquarters for the pro-life group a discouraged Abbey sits with Benjamin. Looking up she smiles at Benjamin. Unaccustomed to being the object of anyone's admiration Torn looks at Abbey puzzled, "What's wrong?" he asks. The tender Abbey reaches out and caresses his cheeks. "Nothing is wrong. I was just thinking that when you persuaded the guard to go back inside you probably saved four lives. We turned four of the women away after the guard left." A smile creases Benjamin's lips. "I tried to reason with him, but he wouldn't listen to me. How did you reach him?" she wanted to know. "I simply pointed out to him that we all have something of value that we wouldn't care to lose." The thinly veiled threat is beyond the understanding of the gentle woman.

Looking back down at the papers in front of her Abbey begins to cry. Getting up from his seat Benjamin then walks around the desk and wraps his arms around Abbey. "This time I know that there must be something wrong," Benjamin wants to comfort her. "It's never enough. For all of our efforts we can't seem to stem the tide. More and more of the unborn children are dying in the guise of personal freedom," she pours out her heart. "Then maybe we need to up the ante," the tortured man answers with another veiled threat. "I don't know what more we can do," the naive Abbey replies.

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A specter of evil hovers over the sleepy town of Hillcrest. As The clock in the town's square chimes midnight, Phillip, the director of the Hillcrest Family Clinic sits at his desk reviewing the paperwork for an upcoming quarterly review. A janitor mops the clinic's empty corridor's floor just outside of Phillip's office. A second doctor is inventorying the medical supplies in the storage room beside Phillip's office. It seems to the three men a very typically quiet and boring night's work.

A shadowy figure slithers around the building's outskirts. A very unassuming box is placed against the outside wall of Phillip's office. The ghostly figure flees away from the building. A huge explosion follows. The light which results from the flames of the explosion lights the night revealing the perpetrator to be Benjamin. Quickly he disappears into the night.

A man sits alone on a train. An attractive woman sits down across from him not saying a word. The woman opens her newspaper and begins to read.

Shaking her head she mutters aloud, " Three people killed in the bombing of a health clinic in a small town. It seems that you aren't safe anywhere, nowadays." The man looks into the woman's eyes and remarks, "It's a world gone mad that we live in today." The woman quickly looks away from the empty soulless eyes that stare blankly back at her. Torn turns his head and stares out of the train window as he rides toward the unsuspecting city of Baltimore.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 11
CHOICES

Naive as it may sound many find one thing to be true, the young believe that things that matter most will never change. Your best friend at eight will be your best friend at one hundred and ten. We believe that our favorite toy will always give us joy, the good guy will always win and being good is it's own reward - then you grow up. The world takes away your hopes and its illusions and we're left unarmed except for the moral codes and ethics that our parents so diligently worked to instill in us.

Gil, Robert, and Bradley have been best friends for what seems like forever. The same is true of Janet, Bonnie and Sheila, but times change. The demands of school and maintaining other relationships forces Janet and Bradley to face their first adult decision. Choices make the friends drift apart, like separate pieces of driftwood upon the evening tide. The couple choose to spend less time with their friends. Soon friends tire of the effort it takes to stay in touch. Friendships fade away.

A more caring person than Bradley one is not likely to meet, but the demands of school make even him oblivious to the problems of the people around him. That is another choice he makes.

An important mechanism for surviving college is study groups. Some first year law students form one. Oddly enough even though their academic survival is tied closely together this group never become friends. That is why when members of the group are in trouble others don't know until it is far too late.

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Looking back Bradley remembers one member of their first year study group, a boy named Roger. He can't even recall the fellow's last name. Now Bradley wonders how is it that he had seen him almost everyday for months and not known what was coming.

One day after mid-term exams Roger went ballistic. The Resident Assistant of the dorm where Roger lives storms into the library and drags Bradley and another member of their study group, Tony, back to the scene at the dorm. Roger has barred himself in his room. They can hear the sound of things breaking and being thrown about. No one is sure if he is just tearing up property or if he is doing harm to himself, but they believe that it is more likely both.

Through his dorm room door Bradley speaks to Roger and is able to calm him down. The door opens. At that point the campus security and the Resident Assistant rush into the room followed by Bradley and others. Furniture is broken and a computer is smashed. On the floor papers are shredded and scattered all around the room.

All that comes to Bradley's mind at the time, seeing his schoolmate being escorted to mental health by security, is the plans Roger had told him about for his life after law school. He was going to open a law office in his old neighborhood, bringing affordable legal help to the disadvantaged.

If someone had made time to talk to him he might have made it. Choices had to be made. Friendships just were not a priority at this point in the young student's life.

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The first year of law school everyone talked about the ideal of what the law represented. To Bradley there was one basic tenant, "Protect those who can not protect themselves." By the end of the first year he is more concerned with surviving law school than he is with any lofty ideals.

The second year he has learned better how to manage his time. Now he and Janet are able to spend more time together. All remaining members of his study group seem to have a newfound confidence about their chances for surviving law school. Yet when they now speak of personal goals it has less to do with their ideals and more to do with how much money they can make, if they can just hold on. Bradley has begun to reflect on why he had wanted to be a lawyer in the first place and wonders if like many of his peers he has lost sight of his duty to the law. Choices have to be made.

It becomes clear that some of the study group have already made bad choices. The first scandal of the second year occurs when one of their professors, Derrick Lawson, discovers that one of his student assistants has gotten a hold of his mid-term, made copies and has sold the answers to a few of the more enterprising students.

Two members of Bradley's group come to him and offer to share the results with the group. Not one for short cuts he makes the right choice, he passes on their offer.

When he thinks back on this incident he wonders if that was where he had made his first compromise, did principle require him to rat his fellow study mates out. Principle be damned. He understood why they did

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did it. All the demands made on everyone it becomes hard to keep up. Some look for short cuts to lighten their load.

The reason Bradley didn't succumb to this temptation is that he feels to compromise his principles is a heavier load to bear.

The professor, unbeknownst to anyone, changed the test. Those giving the answers which are from the first test fail and are expelled.

The Summer of Bradley's second year is an eventful one. The scholarly young man earns a prestigious internship with the very lovely and powerful Judge Caroline Beecham.

Night after night he toils over law book after law book preparing briefs and other papers for the judge. Some nights he would fall asleep, his head upon the judge's desk and just dream of being in Janet's arms instead. Again more choices.

The judge's office, where Bradley is diligently at work is as quiet as a graveyard. Sitting at his desk he is typing away on the computer when Judge Beecham enters. She is a tall, beautiful and svelte creature, one who fills men's heads with fantasies. It made Bradley uncomfortable to be alone with her. It made him even more uncomfortable when she would stand behind him with her hands on his shoulders, as it was her habit to do. None of this had gone unnoticed by Caroline or that the handsome young man would sneak peeks at her when he thought she wasn't looking. To her it was flattering and titillating for although Bradley is twenty years her junior he acts more mature than many of the men she dates her

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own age. Besides, he is every bit the type of man she has always been looking for ... an idealist, but levelheaded, handsome and intelligent. "Why should age matter?" she asks herself.

One night as they work closely together Caroline turns to Bradley and asks, "Do you have a tuxedo? " He laughs. " I'm lucky to have a suit," he jokes. Caroline leans her body across his. Although seemingly innocent Bradley can feel her firm body pressing against him. The scent of her perfume is undeniably intoxicating to his senses. Pulling open a desk drawer the judge takes out a business card then stands up. The card she holds is given to Bradley. A smile crosses her lips as she sees how nervous she is making her young intern.

Reaching into her pocketbook she takes out a hundred dollar bill, places it in an envelope and hands that to Bradley. "There's only one reason that anyone does these internships, that's to make job contacts. I know I've kept you so busy that you haven't been able to meet people who may be able to help your career, so for all of your good work I'm going to make it up to you. You're going to escort me to the Governor's Ball." A huge smile lights up Bradley's face. "Can I bring a date?" he asks, thinking of Janet. Caroline frowns, but manages to maintain a professional facade. "I'm your date. This is business, not a party," she instructs him.

Understandably Janet is a bit jealous when she finds out that Bradley will be going to the Governor's Ball without her. After all, Caroline may be over forty, but she is still an incredibly beautiful woman. As Bradley gets ready for the ball Janet helps him with his bow-tie. Stepping backward

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she admires him in his formal wear. "I don't blame that old hag for wanting you, but you had better remember who it is that you love," she warns, kidding. Pulling Janet close Bradley kisses her long and hard. "Short of her promising me a judgeship there is nothing she can do to buy my love," he taunts his sweetheart. Janet hits him playfully. "I hate you. Do you know that?" she teases him in return. " You may try to hate me, but you can't. I'm too darn adorable. One kiss and you will fall right back in line," he continues teasing. When Bradley attempts to kiss Janet again she places her hand in between their lips. Taking Bradley by his shoulders she turns him toward the door. Janet pats him on his behind and instructs him, "Go kiss your Lady Judge, Mr. Big Shot. " They both laugh as Bradley heads out the door.

When Bradley reaches the Hall where the Ball is being held he is met by a most breathtaking sight. Caroline is dressed in a low cut red gown with her hair up and her beautiful swan like neck bare. Rattled, Bradley trips as he walks closer. Caroline laughs. "You look beautiful," the words stumble out. Then he has second thoughts about having said them. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that." Caroline is quick to jump in, "Yes you should have and thank you." They both smile at one another. The lovely judge takes Bradley's arm and they enter the hall. "Let's go meet your future, Mr. Dalton," she predicts.

Anyone would be impressed with these magnificent surroundings and even more impressed with the people assembled here. Can you imagine a second year law student, born and raised in the inner city, what his impression of the night must be. There are senators,

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governors, businessmen and many of the city's power brokers. The very influential Caroline introduces him to all of the most powerful people. Everyone is equally as impressed with Bradley as he is with them.

The judge and her intern are being observed by everyone in the room. After all, they are the most attractive couple at the Ball and the age difference combined with the fact that Bradley is Caroline's intern makes them the topic of gossip. The only other topic of interest that comes close to the twosome on the busybody - meter is the Roe vs. Wade decision. Everyone is talking about it. Governor Hall asks Bradley what he thinks of the decision. Never one to bite his tongue Bradley answers him, "I think it is a political sellout. It is hypocrisy to redefine life to appease a voting block ..."

The politicians around Bradley laugh over his naivety. "In an ideal world there would be no compromises, but in the real world compromise is the most common state of being known to a politician or a lawyer," the governor informs the novice. Pulling Bradley's sleeve Caroline leads him away from the others.

"You don't let everyone know everything that you're thinking," she advises her protegee. "I guess I'm not very good at games," is his reply. "It's alright to keep your head in the clouds, but a person must keep their feet firmly planted on the ground," is her last advise to him.

As the night goes on Bradley and Caroline drink sherry. Both are feeling the results of the liquor. Turning to Bradley his mentor speaks, "I brought you

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here for two reasons; one - you earned it and two - because I want you to face your biggest challenge as a lawyer, temptation. If you're a good lawyer, and from the work you've done for me as an intern I have no doubt that you will be an incredible attorney, many people will try to buy your talents. The offers will be hard to resist, but if all you're about is the money and not the law then you won't be a lawyer. You'll be just another bad lawyer joke," she warns.

The night goes by quickly. Soon the two of them stand outside the hall. When Caroline signals for a cab Bradley waves the cab away. "Let me take you home," he offers. Caroline smiles and nods yes. The ride to her home is in silence except for the directions that she gives to him. When they reach her home Bradley looks at the magnificent structure and gasps. She sees the awe in his expression. "That's right, you've never been to my home before. Come in for a second. Let me give you the grand tour." she offers.

Agreeing to the tour he soon finds himself being led through the main hallway and into a stunning drawing room. "Can I get you a drink?" she asks. "Sure." nervously he answers. They sip from their glasses and stare into each other's eyes. A bold Caroline takes the glass from Bradley's hand and places it on the mantle place over the fireplace. Then she moves closer and attempts to kiss him. The faithful boyfriend realizes he has let things go too far. He places his hand in between them, preventing the kiss. Caroline steps back. "I'm sorry. I thought that you wanted to be here with me," she explains. Laughing nervously Bradley answers, "No. I'm the one who's sorry. I do find you more than attractive, but I can't be with you. I am involved with someone," he

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apologizes for letting this get out of hand. "She'll never know," Caroline promises. "... but I will," he states firmly. Again the lady judge is impressed with his ethics, but a little disappointed in what that means. Leaning in she kisses him on the cheek. "You're going to be one hell of a lawyer. Those scamps tonight had better watch out for you. A man of principles," she sighs. " You are far too rare a find these days."

During Bradley's last year of law school he is finding his way back to the ideals that had pointed him here in the first place. The idealist would be the first to admit that Caroline's mentoring helped him find his way back. The two of them never spoke again of the night of the governor's ball.

Before graduating Bradley is being courted from all directions - business, politics, even foundations, but he decides to work for the Baltimore City D.A.'s office and to nurture some of the close relationships which Caroline has helped him establish. The corporate jobs would have paid a great deal more, but he chooses to serve first and prosper later. The real choice is to be a lawyer rather than another lawyer joke.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 12
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When Bradley accepts the job at the D.A.'s office his new boss, William Cummings, assures him that he is grooming him to take over his job ... and soon. In the next election Cummings plans to run for State's Attorney.

Comfortably Bradley is settling into the routine of his job. For Janet her senior year at U.M.B.C. has been completed. "This is the time ...," Bradley tells himself, "... a time for making commitments."

A cool breeze wafts in from the bay as Bradley and Janet sit in one of the premiere restaurants overlooking the Baltimore inner harbor. The boats, the tourists, the moon shimmering off the water all contribute to the ambiance that makes this place perfect for what Bradley has in mind.

The waiter places their food onto the table. Stealthily Bradley has hidden a blue jewelry box behind a glass of wine that sits in front of Janet. When she spots the box Janet tries hard to conceal her excitement. Picking up the box her fingers shake. "... what do we have here?" she puzzles aloud. Looking inside the box Janet is perplexed over its contents. Taking out the keys she holds them up. "Let me guess. You bought me a car?" she kids. "Better," Bradley assures her. "Those are the keys to my apartment. I was hoping you would make them the keys to our apartment," he suggests. "You've never had a bachelor pad. I don't want to prevent you from sowing your wild oats," she tells him, unsure. "I'm not looking to sow any oats, wild or otherwise. The only woman I need in my life is you," he reaffirms. Smiling she kisses Bradley ever

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so tenderly then answers "Yes. I'll move in with you."

Icy glares and deathly silence is all that Mr. Posey gives Bradley as he helps move his youngest daughter's things into Bradley's place. Each time Bradley would pleadingly meet Janet's glances she would laugh and wave him off.

After all of Janet's things have been moved in Mr. Posey plops down with a beer in his hand. "In my day you didn't get to sample the milk. You bought the cow or you moved on," he colorfully comments. "Don't worry Mr. Posey. I love Janet and we do plan on getting married," he assures his perspective father -in- law. For the first time all day Janet's father smiles. He then grabs his future son-in-law by his ears, playfully. "Don't make me come after you with my shotgun," he jokes. The two men laugh. Janet enters the room and smiles at seeing her father and love are friends once more. "Good. I thought the two of you had stopped being best buddies and I didn't like that. Now, tell me what it is the two of you are laughing about," she wants to know. Embarrassed Mr. Posey excuses, "If you women can have girl talk then we men can have boy talk." Waving her hand at her father Janet concedes, "Okay. You have your boy talk." Laughing, she then leaves them alone.

As far as Bradley is concerned living together is great, but it lacks something and he just hasn't figured out what that something is, yet.

The district attorney puts great stock in the truth so he never lies to Janet except for on one particular occasion. Calling from the D.A.'s office he tells her that he has to work late on a case. He also tells her that as soon as he is finished his

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paperwork he will call her and they will go out. Disappointed, but always supportive Janet tells him that she will be waiting by the phone. After Bradley gets off of the phone he joins Janet's family and their friends in preparing the office for a surprise birthday party. The mood is festive as everyone scurries about busying themselves hanging streamers and balloons. Some of them hang banners or pin birthday cards to the bulletin boards. A new girl in the office at the time, Cynthia Blaylock, wheels a giant birthday cake into the main office. Turning to Bradley she asks, "May I go now?" He shakes his head. "No you can not. Around here everyone is family. Being family you're obligated to stay for the party," he instructs her. Cynthia smiles then finds herself a seat next to Mr. Posey.

Finally everything is ready. The impish Bradley calls Janet. He tells her that he is finished and asks her to meet him at his office. Trying to be a good sport, but exasperated, she agrees. She also warns him that her birthday present had better be something spectacular or she will have his head on a platter.

The group that is gathered in Bradley's office hears the elevator doors open. Bradley turns off the office lights and ducks down. Opening the door to the office Janet steps inside, wary because of the darkness. The lights flick on and the party guests jump out screaming, "Happy birthday!" Janet is both startled and delighted. Gleefully she laughs. Spotting her love smiling at her she goes to him and wraps her arms around him and kisses him.

"You big liar you! You had me so fooled! All the way over here I was cursing you out. My birthday and he

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can't find anyone to cover for him. That's what I was telling myself. That and planning how to make you suffer for this," Janet rambles on. Then she notices Cynthia. "Is this a long lost cousin or something?" she kids. Janet and Cynthia shake hands. "I'm the new kid on the block and your husband was kind enough to include me in the surprise," Cynthia explains. "He's not my husband, yet, but I'm glad he included you," Janet warmly welcomes Cynthia as a part of their extended family. The two women are instant friends.

Mrs. Posey gets up from her seat and turns on the radio. Everyone coaxes Janet and Bradley into dancing the first dance. They hold each other close and dance slowly. Their parents soon join in then the others follow.

As the joyous evening comes to a close there is one more surprise remaining for Janet. Leaving Janet standing alone Bradley walks out into the middle of the room. He demands everyone's attention. "I have a very special present for my girl," he announces. Turning and pointing to Mr. Posey, Bradley jokes, "Though Mr. Posey has told me that until I make an honest woman of his daughter she's still his girl." Everyone laughs. Taking a single cupcake from the table he hands it to Janet. "Happy birthday, baby" he says. Janet looks at the cupcake puzzled "Gee whiz, was there a pay cut around here that I didn't hear about?" all the guests laugh.

At first Janet starts to bite into the cupcake when Bradley stops her. "It's not for eating," he informs her. He hands her a knife. Curious, Janet cuts the cupcake in half. The cupcake falls apart revealing a hidden diamond ring. Kneeling in front of Janet the

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happy young man takes her hand. Tears of joy fills Janet's eyes. "Will you do me the honor of being my wife?" Bradley asks. A hush falls over the room. The crowd waits with baited breath for Janet's answer. Through a veil of tears and choking with emotion Janet manages to answer, "Yes, yes ... yes , I will marry you."

The room is filled with cheering and whistling. Mr. Posey walks over to Bradley and picks him up into the air then gently lets him back down. Staring into Bradley's eyes Mr. Posey instructs Bradley, "Make my little girl happy. "

The rest of the night is much like walking around in a dream for the newly betrothed Janet. It is hard for her to believe that something she has wanted for so long is finally here.

The small ring that she so proudly displays seems as large as a boulder to Janet. The future seems filled with wondrous possibilities.

The next day Janet is still basking in the remnants of last night's flood of emotions. For now she has to forget those and concentrate on the arduous task of planning a wedding. They had no idea how huge it would become until the planning is finished.

Over a thousand people fill the largest church in the city. Janet's parents are members. Caroline advises Bradley not to forget anyone because powerful people are vain and easily offended. There are so many flowers at the church people have trouble getting to their seats. All of this is forgotten by Bradley when he sees Janet escorted down the aisle by her father. His only thought is

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that he is truly the luckiest man in the world.

The rest of the day passes in a blur. Quickly they find that the festivities have moved to the Annapolis Room for the reception. Caroline has rented it for them as a wedding present. The Posey's and Bradley's parents are all appropriately impressed.

His boss - Cummings, accompanied by Caroline come over to Bradley and his new bride. "My present to you can't be gift wrapped," Cummings has them intrigued. "Your name ... I sent it in to the election committee to run as the new D.A. for Baltimore City. It's mostly a formality, your candidacy and election is pretty much assured with my endorsement," he says. "Congratulations!" Caroline adds, hugging Bradley.

A commitment to the law, his commitment to the woman whom he loves, all of his future is framed and what a beautiful picture it promises to be.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
ALMOST PERFECT
CHAPTER 13

A dreamer may choose to believe a dream to be real and that the reality he's created to be almost perfect, but a dream is never more than a dream and eventually one must awaken.

Like a mischievous imp the sun beguiles the world into believing that Summer has not been lost, but Wintry winds speak otherwise. A woman is draped in her Winter's splendor as she pushes a stroller which holds her son, all bundled up from the cold.

Despite the weather Bradley's heart glows with a Summer's warmth. When he looks at his wife, belly full and round, it is impossible for him not to believe that all is right with the world. The amorous husband leans down and lifts his wife's blouse away from her stomach then lovingly kisses her tummy. Janet laughs and hugs his head closer. Bradley then stretches out beside his wife upon their couch and listens. His heart flutters with every gurgle and his spirit soars with every motion he perceives. Only happy thoughts run through his mind, "In two months I will hold my first child in my arms, maybe a girl." His thoughts continue to wander. "In two years Janet and I will chase her around this house like the Tasmanian Devil she will have become. Ten years later a little boy will come knocking at the door, grinning with that first crush smile. I'll try to be understanding when I catch them in their first kiss. Then all too quickly eighteen will come. Off to college she will go. I will pretend to be brave, never letting her see me cry as she packs. Then without a doubt soon after another young man will come knocking, only this one will take my little girl away. Soon after that her

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belly will be round and full of life, as her mother's is now, and I will be a grandfather."

Is it any wonder that he could so easily be fooled by that impish sun? Each day after that is equally as beguiling. At night he basks in the magic of the dream he believes to be real. It takes a great effort to drag himself away, even for the briefest of time. Though he loves his job and it fulfills him he can't wait to get back to what's most important, his family.

To him even Janet's birthday seems especially enchanting. The whole day at work he sits like a child anticipating Christmas. He has been planning yet another birthday surprise for this year for the love of his life.

The door to Bradley's office opens and in walks Cynthia. By now this assistant D.A. is more than a fellow worker, she is a dear friend. The district attorney looks up from his work. "Are you finished with the Chisum file?" Cynthia asks. Awkwardly he fumbles through papers on his desk. "You are hopeless. I don't know why you don't just call it a day and go home to that beautiful wife of yours. You surely aren't doing us any good around here in your state." Cynthia pauses then heads for the door. When Cynthia reaches the door she stops and turns to face Bradley again. "By the way, What are we doing for Janet's birthday?" A knowing grin creases Bradley's lips. "I have a very private surprise planned for this evening. That is to say no one else will be in attendance."

A disappointed Cynthia frowns. "I didn't truly want to celebrate with you anyway. Besides I have plans

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for tonight. I was just being polite," she lies. "Don't be like that," her friend pleads. Quickly Cynthia's attitude softens. "I have plans for the four of us for this weekend, but tonight is just for Janet." he vaguely explains.

"For the last few weeks Janet has been down on herself, but I have just the tonic for her ailing spirit," Bradley adds mischievously. "I know that I'm being silly, but I've gotten use to being a part of all of the big events in your life," his friend reminds him. The district attorney walks over to Cynthia and kisses her on her cheek then assures her that she will always be an important part of their lives, just not tonight. The two of them walk into the main hallway of the office. Bradley gives his friend a hug. Teasingly the office busybodies ooohhh and aaahhh. Bradley turns to them and licks his tongue. He then heads for the door and exits.

Two hours later the door to the Dalton home creeps slowly open. The loving husband sneaks in carrying arms full of presents and such. The D.A. closes the door behind himself with his foot. The mountain of gifts and party favors tumble from his arms and thump to the floor. From the top of the stairs Janet yells down to Bradley "Is that you?" As he bends down to pick up the packages he calls up to his wife, "Yeah, it's me sweetheart." After a moment of silence Janet calls down to him again. "What was all of that racket?" Not ready to reveal his surprise yet the sneaky husband collects the packages from the floor and rushes them to the closet to hide. "I dropped a bag of snacks. Remember. I told you that I invited Cynthia and Dave over this weekend for a late birthday celebration." A groan of exasperation echoes through out the Dalton home. "I told you that

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I don't feel like celebrating this year." Janet pauses then continues, " ... when I look in the mirror all I see is this great cow staring back at me." Now Bradley is the one to laugh. "That's ridiculous! You're the most beautiful creature in all of creation ... especially now," the husband tries to reassure his wife. "Besides, by tomorrow morning you will feel totally different about all of this. I promise." Janet laughs. "What are you up to Mr. Dalton?" again Bradley laughs. "Never you mind what I'm up to you just get yourself together and get down here." Janet heads to the bathroom. "As soon as I have my Calgon time." She answers her husband then enters the bathroom and closes the door behind herself.

It is part of Janet's routine to soak in a luxurious bath at the end of each day. Today this gives Bradley the time he needs to prepare his surprise. Bubbles soothe and caress Janet. Meanwhile Bradley scampers around downstairs. From the bag of novelties he has brought in he takes out a long stream of red ribbon. Hard as the attorney tries he can not contain his laughter over his plans for this seemingly innocent party favor. He sets lovingly to his task.

An hour later he hears the pitter - patter of Janet's bare feet across the upstairs hallway. Snickering he calls up , "Janet! Will you please come down here. Now!" Stopping at the bedroom door she groans in frustration. "Can I get dressed first?" she asks impatiently. "You won't need any clothes. Just come here," he insists. Annoyed she stomps through the house then down and into the living room.

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Frozen in her tracks a delighted Janet bursts into laughter at the sight that greets her. A silly grin she wears. "You are truly a fool!," she says with the sweetest of laughs. In front of her stands the respected district attorney wearing nothing save a red ribbon tied into a bow around his waist. The bow barely covers his family jewels. Janet, in contrast, wears a baggy housecoat, rollers in her hair and a comfortable pair of old ratty slippers, yet to Bradley there has never been a more lovely vision.

Smiling he yells, "Happy birthday!" Shaking her head in humorous disbelief his wife marches toward Bradley wearing a devilish grin. "I guess I should unwrap my present," she says as she reaches out to grab the drawstring of the red ribbon. Teasing her, Bradley ducks out of her reach and runs around to the far side of the couch. One love stands on one side of the couch and the other love on the other side. They giggle like teenagers as they stare at one another in anticipation. "I'm available, but not easy. Not that easy anyway," he kids. A hint of a mischievous smirk curls the sides of Janet's mouth. "It's my birthday...," she reminds him. "... and I'm going to give you all of your gifts," Bradley says suggestively. "... but you have to earn the best of them," he instructs her. "Why you rascal." She laughs then gives chase. It isn't hard for Janet to catch her husband since he isn't trying all that hard to get away. Each time she catches him she slaps him on his bare bottom. They laugh then they continue their birthday game. Bradley stops. Gasping for air he declares, "You win. I'm yours." Their laughter fill the room like sweet music for the heart and soul. "What makes you think that I want you?" Janet teases. "Well, if you don't I'm sure that the redhead law clerk in Judge Mercer's

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office does." Her needling husband assures her. Slapping his arm playfully the exasperated wife accuses, "You are awful. Do you know that?" With a smile the lawyer answers, "... awfully good." A lustful glint lights Janet's eyes. "I'll be the judge of that," she replies as she reaches out once more for the ribbon's drawstring. This time her husband stands perfectly still while she pulls it. The bow comes undone then the ribbon floats gracefully and slowly to the floor. Janet steps closer and grabs two hands full of her husband's bare behind. Passionately she kisses him. Stepping away she has left him obviously aroused. Wickedly, she looks down at the results of her efforts and smiles. "I see why that redhead is interested." she lasciviously notes. The two of them laugh again.

All so slowly and sensuously Janet undoes the tie to her robe. Her beautiful full breasts are exposed as the housecoat falls away from her shoulders. Quickly she covers her full belly with her arms. Janet is embarrassed by her appearance. "I'm so fat and ugly," she bows her head. Shaking his head Bradley moves his wife's hands away then lifts her head up and stares lovingly into her eyes. "You must be blind or crazy. No one is more beautiful or more sensuous to me than you ... especially now," he assures her. He then leans in and begins kissing down her body. First he kisses her lips, then her neck then down further until he reaches her belly. Lovingly he looks up at Janet. She cups his head in her hands. Tenderly, Bradley pulls her down beside him onto the rug. Face to face and body pressed tightly to body they kiss one another with the passion of first time lovers. Bradley urges her legs apart then climbs in between them. A quiet gasp escapes her lips as he enters her. "I love you so

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much," she whispers. A silence envelopes them. Thrusting of hips, caressing of hands, lips and tongues are the only language their passions will allow, "What have I done to deserve such happiness?" is the last thing Bradley remembers running through his mind that night.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
THE FIRST THORN
CHAPTER 14

Before the pregnancy in the early years of Bradley's term as D.A. he and Janet have little time together, but they make the most of what they have. Their life together is all that they had ever hoped it could be, except for one missing element, a child.

Like two rabbits during mating season the two of them try and try again. The most frustrating thing for Janet is that she and Bradley have agreed that she will put off her career so that they can start a family immediately. Sometimes he will sneak home during his lunch break, so that they can share a mid-day tryst. They want never to lose the magic in their relationship so they act like teens. Sometimes they will park near the reptile house in Druid Hill Park and make out in the car. Once they were approached by a Baltimore City policeman, who was quick to apologize when he realized who it was.

When Janet has just about given up and began thinking about the possibility of consulting a fertility doctor it happens. She becomes pregnant.

Not even suspecting that she may have succeeded in her attempt to get pregnant Janet has scheduled her yearly appointment with her doctor, Dr. Randall Tisdale. Even though Randall is best of friends with Bradley and Janet when it comes to his medical practice he is a cold and detached professional. Yet this morning, after examining Janet, his persona is anything but professional. He beams with excitement and delight as he reenters the exam room where Janet waits. She is more than a little uncomfortable with his new demeanor. Randall, notes her apprehension, blurting out the good news, "You're going to be a

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mother!" Delighted, scared and a myriad of emotions running through her mind she exclaims, "I'm going to be a mother!" Then more calmly she reflects on what it means. Almost solemnly Janet whispers, "I'm going to be a mother."

There is a brisk wind blowing and the trees are all bare at the inner harbor. It is almost Thanksgiving again and now she and Bradley have one more thing to be thankful for ... there abundance seems to overflow.

The maternity shops she had been avoiding now attract her like a magnet. The toys, the clothes, the gizmos all seemed part of a magical world she had not been previously privy to journey into, but not anymore

After she leaves the shops she walks the promenade of the inner harbor. To her surprise she bumps into an old friend, Sheila. Janet is in a haze. She doesn't even notice her friend. "Hi, Mrs. Dalton." Sheila says, awakening Janet from her haze. "Sheila! Hi. God I've missed you. "Janet hugs her old friend and laughs. The soon to be mom is a prisoner of her euphoric state. Sheila has always been able to read Janet like a book, but today anyone could have told her that she looked about to burst with joy. When her old friend comments on her state Janet excuses herself and asks her to call her later. The soon-to-be-mother has a lunch date with her husband and she wants him to be the first to know.

The two ex-friends part. The elated mother-to-be heads straight for her husband's office.

At lunch Bradley almost chokes on his Big Mac when

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Janet spills the beans about her pregnancy. The two bask in their joy of knowing that their dreams of a family is close to coming true. It is Janet who thinks of the plan to tell their parents at the same time, so no one will feel slighted and begin an emotional tug of war that might spoil their blessed event.

Without telling them why Janet loads her parents into her car and brings them to her and Bradley's home. At the same time Bradley has done the same with his parents.

Mr. Posey is more than a little annoyed over not being told anything and Bradley's father isn't in a much better mood. "What are we doing here?" Mr. Posey asks Bradley's father. "No one talks to me. They just order me around like they are my father," he tells Justine. "If the curious cat and Billy goat gruff are through complaining we do have a reason for asking you here," Janet assures them. Gushing with excitement Janet announces, "We're having a baby!"

Everyone begins hugging and kissing one another. Janet's father jokes, "We were beginning to wonder if the old soldier could stand to attention." Janet pulls on her father's ear. "Didn't I see some Viagra in your medicine cabinet the other day," she teases him in return. "I'm still your daddy. You ain't too grown to spank. Besides your mama will tell you the general don't need no help." They all laugh as Mr. Posey grabs his wife and pulls her close to him.

The room is filled with laughter and hope. They don't know it at the time, but this is to be the best moment of their lives.

THE FIRST THORN

Eight months into the pregnancy Bradley receives a phone call at work. It's Randall. He is calling to tell him that Janet is in the hospital and that he needs to get there immediately. On the way to the hospital all sorts of things run through Bradley's mind. When he gets there his parents and Janet's parents are already in the waiting room. He rushes to Randall's side. Visibly upset Bradley demands "What the hell is going on?" Randall tries to settle his friend down. "The first thing I need for you to do is to calm down. You can't help yourself or Janet if you're upset," Randall advises Bradley. "What's going on," Bradley repeats, in a calmer tone. "Is Janet alright? Is the baby alright?" the questions follow one after another.

The parents all look down at the floor. No one has the heart to answer him. "Janet has some medical problems, but she's going to be fine. The thing is ... she lost the baby and it doesn't look like she'll be able to carry a child to term ... ever." Bradley falls apart. He weeps until he has no more tears to cry. His mother cradles her son's head to her bosom.

Composing himself Bradley pulls away then stifles his tears. "I need to go to my wife." Bradley says to everyone. "Let me go in with you." Janet's mother offers. "In a little while. There are some things that I need to say to my wife first, alone," he tells his mother-in-law. Mr. Posey tugs at his wife's hand. Putting on a brave face Bradley walks down the halls of the hospital.

Quietly he pushes the door to Janet's room open and enters. His wife is resting from her ordeal. Lying on her hospital bed Janet stares up at the blank,

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white ceiling. As Bradley enters she turns her back to the door and rolls over onto her side. It tears at his heart that he can see her body jerk and hear the gentle sounds of her sobbing. His only wish is that he could bear the anguish for his wife. Bradley rushes to her bedside.

Cautiously sitting down, not sure if he might hurt her physically, he leans over and gently kisses her cheek. Janet recoils away from him. "I let you down," she says. Tenderly he turns her over, so that he can look into his wife's eyes. "I don't ever want to hear you say anything so foolish ever again about the woman I love," he reassures her. "It's not your fault. You did everything that you could to insure a healthy pregnancy. It's just not our turn ... yet," he answers.

"Randall says we will never have children," Janet reminds him. "What does he know. I beat him at pinochle every time we play," Bradley tries to lighten the mood. They laugh, a very shallow and quick laugh, but for a moment they do laugh. Bradley wraps his arms around Janet and she settles back into them and falls asleep. "We have a good life." Bradley talks to himself while Janet rests. "You make me happy and that is all I need," he tries to convince himself.

After a short time Bradley places Janet's head back upon her pillow and he leaves the room. Knowing that the others would be anxiously awaiting a chance to see Janet or at least find out how she's doing he goes to them. Their parents and siblings have moved from the waiting room. Outside of her room they all wait. He exits. Gail speaks for all of them, "My mother told us what happened. We're so ... so sorry."

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They all cry and console one another with hugs and kisses. Tenderly Bradley's mother pulls him into her arms and whispers, "Have I told you how proud I am of the man that you've become? Anyone can accept joy, but you learn the true measure of a man in how well he deals with adversity and pain." His mother's words are a comfort to Bradley, but he isn't all that sure how true they ring. To him his strength doesn't come from any sense of manhood. It comes from his love for Janet and being aware that she needs him to be strong right now more than ever before.

How does he deal with his own grief? There Is a place in his heart he sets aside where he will keep his son alive. And when things are at their worst and become too much to bear he will go there. They will talk. Other times he will teach his son how to tie his shoes, how to field a grounder and all of the things dads get to teach their sons. So what if it is only make pretend.

Bradley and Janet have only seen the beauty of the roses in their lives. Now they know the ache of the first thorn.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 15
CUTTING THE CORD

After a lot of hard work Sharon has graduated from nursing school. It is the same year that the Daltons lose their son. Although she still lives at home with her mother they don't talk much. It is more like two strangers sharing a place than a mother and a daughter sharing a home. Several of the local hospitals have tried to recruit Sharon out of nursing school, but one of her classmates tells her about a doctor who is looking for a nurse to assist him with his patients. Sharon believes that she will be happier in a friendly and less hectic work environment than a hospital, so she takes the job with Dr. Kirk Harrison. Besides the less hectic pace, there is a need in Sharon to be part of a family, part of something where people care about you as a person.

The first week on the job she knows that she has made the right choice, for her, for now. The money is good but more importantly Dr. Kirk Harrison and his patients make her feel at home, like she is part of their family and that they truly care for her.

After commuting back and forth the twenty miles total every day for more than a year Sharon then makes another decision. It is time to cut the cord.

On her days off she looks around for an apartment closer to work. After viewing a few places she decides on one. Now she has to face her mother with the news. It had been easy for her to convince herself that her mother would probably be relieved to have her gone, but deep down inside she knows this isn't true.

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As usual a suffocating silence blankets the dinner table. One can hear a pin drop. The silence is broken by the forced conversation Sharon initiates. "How was your day?" she asks Bernice. "Since when do you ask me about my day?" is Bernice's grumpy reply. "Never mind." Sharon resigns herself. "We won't be annoying each other much longer. I got myself an apartment closer to work," she informs her mother. "You never told me that you were thinking about moving." Bernice answers, surprised over this revelation. "I'm twenty-four years old. It's time that I left the nest." Sharon replies. Jumping up from the table Bernice storms away. "Go! I don't need you. I've never been able to count on anyone before. Why should I expect you to be any different," she reprimands her daughter. Disappointed Bernice marches into her bedroom then slams the door behind herself.

Most of the things that are going into Sharon's apartment are new and being delivered from the store to her new home. The now independent young woman rents a truck for the few things that she is bringing from her mother's home. As Sharon struggles with the ramp of the rental truck her new neighbor, Clarice, happens along. "Can you use a hand?" the friendly woman asks. The ramp is stuck half of the way in and out of its compartment. Relieved Sharon turns to the good Samaritan. "Thank you! I really could use a hand," Sharon answers her new neighbor. "This dang thing is stuck. I can't get it any further out, but I can't get it back in either," Sharon explains her dilemma. Appraising the situation Clarice tells Sharon, "You don't really need a ramp with the small items that you have, so let's just get that dang thing back in," Clarice half teases her new neighbor as she grabs the end of

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the ramp, wiggles her hips and pushes firmly. The ramp slides easily back into its compartment. Sharon laughs. "You're a miracle worker . . .," then realizing that she doesn't even know her helper's name. "Clarice," the woman introduces herself. They shake hands. "Sharon," she introduces herself to the neighbor.

The two young women carry the boxes and knickknacks into the apartment. Clarice looks around and nods her head. "Your first time on your own, right?" Staring at her new friend amazed, Sharon wonders aloud, "How did you know?" Laughing, Clarice explains, "This place is Spartan to say the least. A sure sign of a novice." Not liking the sound of that Sharon frowns. Smiling her neighbor assures her, "Don't worry. In four months time you won't recognize this place."

The task of emptying the truck is done and the two women plop down upon Sharon's couch exhausted. Turning to Sharon, Clarice can't help but laugh and point out to her, "This is the last time you will let sweaty people plop down onto your couch." They laugh then roll onto the floor.

"Why don't I ride with you to the rental place so that you can return your truck. What do you have, about an hour before they add sixty bucks to your bill?" Clarice displays her business savvy. Looking at her watch Sharon turns to the neighbor and thanks her, "What would I have done without you today?" Her neighbor looks at her and jokes, "Perished." They laugh again.

The rental place is empty except for the single clerk behind the counter, talking on the phone, and

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the manager, who is in the back.

The two new friends have managed to get there with five minutes to spare before extra charges will be added on. They walk up to the counter. The clerk is still talking on the phone to a friend. Patiently they wait for the woman to finish.

Finally the clerk hangs up the phone and turns to Sharon and Clarice. Upset that they have interrupted her phone conversation she snaps at them, "Can I help you!" Ignoring the clerk's rude tone Sharon simply hands her the rental agreement papers. The clerk takes the papers to the side, marks on them, then begins to work on her calculator. When the clerk returns to the two friends she presents them with a bill for sixty dollars. The timid Sharon starts to open up her pocketbook and take out her credit card when Clarice snatches the papers from her and examines them. Pissed off Clarice screams at the clerk, "She's not paying you one damned cent more!" Clarice places the bill back onto the counter. Frightened of the irate woman the clerk tries to explain that Sharon has to pay for an additional day because they don't prorate portions of a day. Without giving Sharon a chance to talk Clarice gruffly answers the clerk, explaining that they did return the truck before the deadline and that if she had gotten her butt off of the phone and taken care of them when they first came in she would know that. The clerk goes into the back and returns with her manager. The annoyed neighbor barks the same information at him. The manager apologizes then tears up the bill.

The two new friends walk out of the truck rental office grinning like Cheshire cats. All the way back

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to the apartment Sharon wears a big smile. Not understanding Sharon's delight Clarice turns to her and asks, "What are you still smiling about?" Looking away embarrassed Sharon answers, "No one has ever taken up for me before." It was Clarice's turn to smile. "That's what friends are for . . ." Sharon mimics Clarice, "... friends. Yeah." They smile and ride along in silence.

That is the start of a true friendship. They are as inseparable as Siamese twins. They go shopping together, to the movies and on rare occasions they even go out to nightclubs together. Neither is shy and they do their fair share of flirting, but more often than not they come home with each other.

Three months pass before Clarice meets Bernice.

It is the unofficial last weekend of the summer, labor day weekend. Sharon decides to throw a bar-b-q. The only guest she is expecting is Clarice. There is no reason to believe there will be anyone else. The smoke from the grill is filtering into the apartment. The two joke about the briskets of charcoal probably tasting better than the meat they had on the grill. The doorbell rings. "Now who could that be?" Sharon wonders aloud as she makes her way toward the door.

Curious, the friend follows close behind her. "It's probably that guy we met at the club last week," Clarice teases, she knows that the guy had annoyed the heck out of Sharon. "If he can get in touch with me with the number I gave him then he must be a magician," Sharon kids. A stunned Sharon stands staring at her mother who is standing in her doorway. "Are you going to invite me in?" Bernice

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snaps at her daughter. Grabbing her mother's hand Sharon ushers her in. "Of course I'm going to invite you in mama. It's just that I'm so surprised. Why didn't you tell me that you were coming over," she asks. "I call you all of the time and leave messages, but you never return any of my calls," Bernice exaggerates.

The new friend has already made up her mind to not like Bernice because of the things Sharon has told her about her childhood. Coldly she stares at Bernice. The disagreeable Bernice returns her icy glare. "Do I know you?" Bernice barks. Trying to remain civil, for Sharon's sake, Clarice politely replies, "No. You don't know me. I'm a friend to Sharon." Rudely turning her back to Clarice, Bernice talks to her daughter. "Is this why you had to move away from home, so you and your friends can hang out doing lord knows what?" Refusing to be drawn into her mother's games anymore Sharon tells her mother, "I'm not going to argue with you. If you would like to stay for the bar-b-q you are welcomed to stay, if not, it was nice seeing you and you're welcome to visit anytime you'd like."

For the first time Bernice realizes that her daughter is not going to tolerate anymore of the foolishness that she had been allowed to get away with in the past. "You misunderstood me. I wasn't trying to start a fight. All I meant is that you could have had friends over to the house if that was your only reason for moving out," is Bernice's excuse. It takes all of Sharon's discipline to contain her laughter. There is no way she could count all of the friends she had lost because of her mother's mistreatment of them, but not today or ever again. Her new friend is going to enjoy being here,

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even if that means throwing her mother out.

The food is finally done. Despite the jokes they had made the aromas and look of the food promises a gourmet's treat. Acting as co-hostess, Clarice, fixes a plate of food and hands it to Bernice. Refusing to accept the plate Bernice growls at the friend, "I'm not handicapped. I can fix . . .," then she stops in mid-sentence when she notices Sharon glaring at her. "... uh . . . thank you," she turns to her daughter. "What is this child's name?" she asks. The two friends can only laugh in quiet resignation. "She's only two feet away from you. If you ask her I'm sure she'll tell you her name." Sharon chastises her mother. "Clarice." The friend answers, hoping to put an end to this silliness. A hush falls over the room. The remainder of the evening is pretty quiet.

The first to leave that evening is Bernice. After the mother is gone Sharon and Clarice sit silently for a while. They are making a concerted effort not to talk about the impression Bernice has made. Sitting in front of Sharon's TV the two friends are only half watching the movie they have put into the VCR. "Have you ever been in love?" Sharon asks her friend. Tossing popcorn across the room at her friend Clarice remarks, "We should not have gotten Casablanca." Wearing a solemn expression Sharon frowns. Her friend answers her a little more seriously, "I don't think so. I've had my share of crushes, but no one that I felt like I wanted to spend the rest my life with them."

A melancholy settles over the two friends. "I want that," Sharon admits to her friend. Clarice smiles

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and replies, "Get in line my friend because everyone wants that. The problem is finding the one who you want to love and who wants to love you back."

Suddenly Sharon clicks the remote turning off the movie. "Hey! I was watching that," Clarice lies. "It's not in a movie. We have to go out there and make ourselves available to it. I've made up my mind. I'm leaving Dr. Harrison's and I'm taking a job at a hospital," Sharon declares. Now Clarice is confused. "What does one thing have to do with the other?" she asks. "The more available men I meet the better the chance I have of finding what I'm looking for ... besides it's about time I took off my training wheels and faced life full on. That's what grownups do, isn't it?" Sharon asks and answers.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 16
SECOND CHANCE

The bitter cold in Janet's heart is almost matched by the winter's chill, which follows a year after the loss of her baby. There were two big snows. Each practically closing down the city. After the second snow Janet comes down with the flu and is laid up in bed for ten days. Afterwards her dotting husband insists that she have a checkup.

Only because she is feeling too defeated to fight with anyone does she agree to go. The spiritless woman sits on the examining table waiting for her doctor's return. Casually she flips through an old magazine. This is just a routine exam upon the insistence of her overly protective husband.

The door to the examination room opens. Randall enters. He is followed by his nurse. The friend wears an expression of concern. "Can I get dressed, Randall?" Janet impatiently demands. "You're over the flu, but we have a situation that I need to talk to you about," he seems overly mysterious to Janet. Swiveling her head back and forth from doctor to nurse and then doctor again, their pensiveness is beginning to worry her. "Before I tell you what's going on I want to strongly advise you to rectify this situation immediately!" Randall is insistent. All he has done so far is scare the hell out of Janet. "Are you going to tell me what's going on or are you going to wait until the suspense gives me a heart attack?" she asks sarcastically. "You are pregnant again," he informs her. The emotionally drained woman faints dead away.

A gentle patting of her face is enough to urge Janet back to reality. "Get her a glass of water," she

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hears Randall tell his nurse. The nurse fills a paper cup with cool water and puts it to Janet's lips. Slowly Janet sips of the water. "How could this happen?" she asks. "Like I told you after you lost the baby, it was a one in a hundred thousand chance that you might ever conceive a child again, but it has happened. Now we have to talk about this.

Janet feels dizzy. Her mind is reeling. "I am pregnant," she thinks. Randall rambles on and on, but Janet hasn't heard a single word. Visions of her and Bradley with their baby, doing things together, blocks out all else. The dream is shattered by the sound of Randall's persistent voice, "Janet ... Janet! You have to listen to me. You can not take the chance of trying to carry this child to term. The risks are too great. If you try more than likely you both will die. Hear me ... you *BOTH* will most likely die."

Calmly Janet looks into Randall's eyes and speaks, "You said that the odds were that I would never conceive again, but I did. Isn't there the smallest chance that you could be wrong about this too?" All Randall can do is sigh and nod his head in resignation. "Yes. There is the smallest chance, but believe me when I say it is a very small chance," he warns her. Randall can see the determination in her eyes. For him this isn't just a patient, but a friend who is about to venture down a road pith with folly. "You know that I love you and Bradley and there is nothing I would wish for the two of you more than this, but this is taint amount to committing suicide," again he warns. "Can you honestly stand there and tell me that there is no

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way that I can carry this pregnancy to term and have a healthy child," she challenges him. "Of course I can't predict absolutely what will or won't happen, but the risks are far too great for you to reasonably assume them," he tries to reason with Janet. She laughs. "Tell me, what the hell is reasonable about asking a woman to give up all hope of ever being a mother?" What is reasonable about telling me and my husband to forget our dreams of a family? There isn't a damn thing reasonable about this whole situation!" Janet screams.

A beaten Randal concedes, "The final decision is yours, but I think that you should at the very least talk things over with Bradley before making your final decision." The wife shakes her head, no. "I'm going to tell him that I'm pregnant and that's all I'm going to tell him and I forbid you to tell him anything more," she commands. "You and Bradley can adopt and enjoy a family and a full life together, but if you die what will your husband have left? Think about it," he employs his friend.

Even as she is leaving out of his office Randall is still warning her and pleading with Janet to end her pregnancy. His pleas fall upon deaf ears. After kissing her friend on the cheek Janet leaves going home to wait for her husband.

While she waits for Bradley she goes over the precautions she will take during this pregnancy. "I overexerted myself the last time," she tells herself. "I won't do that this time. We'll hire a cook and someone to clean. No exercising. A nutritionist, I'll talk with a nutritionist. Nothing, but the right foods. I can make this happen," she convinces herself.

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Bradley has just won the biggest case of his career up to that point. Two police officers have been convicted of the homicide of an innocent black male teen. The D.A. literally hates a system which gives so much latitude to its peace officers that something like this can happen. And he grieves for a boy who died unnecessarily. Also, he wonders about the prognosis for a society which is so afraid of its youth that they are willing to shoot first and asks questions later.

All the inner turmoil melts away when Bradley sees his wife sitting and waiting for him. Slowly he sits down beside her, takes her in his arms and tenderly kisses her lips. When they part he looks into her eyes and sees tears. Janet closes her eyes. Bradley kisses her closed eyelids. "What's wrong sweetheart?" he asks, concerned. She laughs a feeble laugh. "Nothing's wrong. I'm just so happy." He laughs. "So am I, but I'm not crying. Boo-hoo. Boo-hoo," he teases. Playfully Janet slaps his arm. "You're terrible," she notes. "What's really wrong?" he insists. "There's nothing wrong. In fact everything is better than it has ever been before," his wife assures him. Janet takes his hand and places it on her stomach. "Is there anything wrong with a miracle?" Bradley looks at her amazed and bewildered. "You're not telling me ... could this happen ? I thought Randall said that you couldn't get pregnant again," he rambles on. "Doctors can be wrong," she answers.

They both laugh and hug one another. Bradley showers her face with kisses. Janet pushes him backward upon the couch and kisses him passionately. Gently Bradley rolls her over until he hovers over his wife, staring down into her eyes. "A second chance,"

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is all he can say.

Suddenly Bradley sits up. Randall's warning echoes in his mind. She can't get pregnant, but even if she could I wouldn't advise it. The joy fades. It is replaced by a somber caution. Holding his wife's face in his hands he pleads with her, "Tell me the truth ... Does this pregnancy put you at risk?" Without blinking she lies convincingly, "There's some risk. More for me than most women, but nothing for either of us to worry about." She continues the lying, "Randall is going to keep a close eye on me. I'm going to have to take some precautions, like hiring people to cook and clean, seeing a nutritionist and being careful not to overexert myself this time."

"We don't need a child to make our lives full. We can adopt. The most important thing to me is that I share my life with you," Bradley assures his wife. With all of his heart he tries to convey to Janet that her safety is the most important thing in the world to him. It goes in one ear and out the other. She has made up her mind and nothing is going to veer her from this all too perilous course. Convinced that she has persuaded Bradley that there is nothing to worry about Janet is content to snuggle with him on the couch.

Unsure of Janet's truthfulness later that week Bradley seeks the help of their families to talk some sense into his wife. The doorbell rings. Looking back at her husband Janet resigns herself to the fact that he isn't getting up. The sight that greets her, their two families gathered at the door, sets her radar in motion. This has the look of an ambush, and she can guess why they are here.

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A few minutes later everyone is seated at the kitchen table. Fake smiles and polite conversation is the staple. It is Bradley who broaches the subject of Janet's pregnancy. "I want to make an announcement. My very beautiful wife is pregnant ... again." The pretending is over. No one acts surprised. "I can't do this," Janet's father admits. "We all already know about you being pregnant. We're here to talk you out of this foolishness." There is silence then Justine continues his speech, "We love you. And no one wants you to do anything that might put your life in jeopardy."

Everyone except Janet lets out a collective sigh of relief. It is said. Gail is the one who says the unthinkable. "It's perfectly legal and makes sense to have an abortion. The disdain in Janet's eyes for her sister cuts like a knife. Again Janet chooses to continue the lies. "I don't know why you are saying these horrible things. I told Bradley that Randall doesn't foresee any problems that can't be worked out. Besides, no matter what anyone thinks I'm having my baby."

It is all too quiet in Bradley and Janet's home. The silence is finally broken by a weeping mother. Marge implores her child, "Baby ... if I have to choose between losing you or a grandchild that hasn't been born there is no choice." An insistent Janet assures her mother that she doesn't have to choose because all is well.

A frustrated Mrs. Posey pulls at her husband's arm. "I want to go home." she tells her husband. Gail and Mr. Posey try to console Marge, but she pulls away from them and heads for the door. "No! I just want to go home!" she screams, upset over her daughter's

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foolhardy attitude.

A roar escapes Janet's lips, "No one is going home!" All eyes are on Janet. "There are no problems except you people getting me upset! I am going to have a healthy baby and that's the end of it!" she insists on continuing the facade.

No one in the room believes a single word Janet has spoken, but they resign themselves to the fact that she has mind up her mind. No matter what the cost she is going to try to carry this child to term. The only choices left to them is to support her decision and pray. Still Bradley is determined to get at the truth.

Anxiously Bradley waits outside of Randall's office in his car. It's after office hours and the last of Randall's patients and his nurse are exiting the office. Shortly afterward Randall exits alone. Feeling guilty, but resolved to protect his wife Bradley jumps from his car and runs toward Randall. At first his friend smiles, but then Randall reads the determination on Bradley's face and knows that he now faces a moral dilemma. He can't violate his doctor-patient privilege, but how can he keep this from his friend when he knows that doing so endangers the life of his friend's wife.

Hand extended to greet Bradley, Randall hides his apprehension. "Odd seeing you here," Randall pretends. "In the neighborhood ..." Bradley makes light of their encounter then shakes Randall's hand. He eyes his friend suspiciously. "You had to know that I would have some questions, Bradley tells Randall. "Oh. The pregnancy. Well ... actually no. I figured that you and Janet would have gone over all

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of this, because of her past problems." Randall dodges Bradley's inquiry. "We talked. She said that she would have to take some special precautions, but that it was alright for her to try to have this baby," fearfully he tells her doctor what he's been told. "I can't add anything to that," Randall skillfully evades answering his friend.

A sigh of relief escapes Bradley. Mistaking Randall's evasiveness for a confirmation of Janet's honesty. "I need you to keep this visit just between you and I. I don't want Janet to think that I'm spying on her or anything." Bradley asks of his friend. "She won't hear it from me," Randall assures him. The two men part.

As Randall sits in his car he still wonders if he has done the right thing. Starting his car up then pulling away he leaves the office day behind him. He decides that there probably isn't any right answer for his situation.

At the time Bradley thanks god for this second chance. Reflecting back now he wonders, "Was that god's reminder that they should have spoken up for the lost children or was it the universe confirming that there is no god, that there are only a series of random acts leading to an inevitable end?

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 17
ABSENCE OF COLOR

Fair or not, some of us are embraced by life's grace, privy to a spectrum of its vibrant colors. Others are color blind.

Nothing in life has brought Sharon the completeness she has very vigorously sought, so she decides to make another major life change. It is time to leave the comfort and protection of Dr. Harrison's office. The truth is she wants a job where she can meet more men. Very simply, she is looking for love.

This major life change begins with taking a job at Sinai Hospital. Not long after starting work at the hospital one of the interns, Michael, who is known for his womanizing, starts to flirt with Sharon. Michael is charming, funny and handsome. Although everyone warns her about him she wants to believe that she can change him. For a time it seems as though she may have been right.

It is the first time Sharon is in a relationship which gives her all of the things she has so desperately sought. They spend quiet times together. Michael is also romantic and sweeps her off to exotic locations. He even showers her with gifts. One time they were at a ball game and a blimp flew by overhead bearing the message, "Michael loves Sharon!" tears welled up in her eyes. Their lovemaking is more than she has ever dreamed lovemaking could be. Not even her mother's predictions of doom and gloom can spoil Sharon's hopes for the future.

For a short time Sharon's life is good, again.

ABSENCE OF COLOR

It isn't often that Michael and Sharon don't spend the night together, but this particular night Michael is working late, so Sharon goes home to a seemingly empty gloomy apartment.

In the morning when Sharon awakens she catapults herself from her bed and rushes to the bathroom. Her head is half inside the toilet while her arms are wrapped around the porcelain base as she repeatedly throws up into the bowl. The odd thing is the only thought on her mind is, "I'm glad Michael can't see me right now."

Separating herself from the bowl and climbing shakily to her feet Sharon stands there trying to figure out what could be bothering her stomach so much. Was it the egg-foo-young she had eaten at 3:00 in the morning. She begins to laugh then like a blinding light it hits her. Excitedly she wonders, "...is it true? Could she truly be pregnant?" At that moment she is more happy than she has ever been before. It is short lived. A twinge of fear creeps in. Will things change? Is he ready for this? Doubts! The possibility that Michael may not be ready to be a father or that he may think that this is a trick to make him marry her. "It isn't definite that she is pregnant so why worry unnecessarily," she asks herself.

There's only one way to quiet these doubts. Sharon gets dressed and goes down to the corner drugstore. Much like some thief casing the joint Sharon creeps about the store. Looking over her right shoulder repeatedly she checks to see if anyone is watching her. Going down one aisle after another finally her search ends, she finds a home pregnancy test kit. Cautiously she takes one more look around before she

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picks up the package.

Back in the privacy of her home she nervously prepares to take the test. Timidly she looks at the results of the test and all of her emotions drain away. Much like a zombie she marches around her apartment. First she cries, then she laughs, then she bangs her fists on the table, then she laughs once more. She finds herself on a roller coaster ride. Her emotions hold her tightly in their grasp and she rides them up and down, down and up, up and down until she is exhausted. Totally spent she decides to just be happy. At least until she knows for sure how Michael feels about her news.

The room is lit by scented candles, a scrumptious meal is on the table, there is a bottle of wine chilling in an ice bucket. Michael and Sharon stare into each other's eyes across the dinner table. "What did I do to deserve this special treatment?" he wonders aloud. "You make me happy," she whispers the words she has so cautiously chosen. Words she had not said to him before this night. Michael laughs. "If that's the case then you may as well chain yourself to a pot belly stove because I intend to make you happy for a very long time to come," he promises. A hush falls over the room as the two lovers sip their wine and taste of their feast.

All during the meal Sharon tries to broach the subject of her pregnancy, but each time her courage fails her.

When the meal is over Michael gets up from his seat and goes around the table to the other side. Gently he urges her up from her seat. Although there is no music playing he takes her into his arms and dances

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slowly and closely around the room with her until they reach the stereo system. Once there he turns the system on and it begins to play a romantic ballad. They continue to dance. Michael kisses Sharon's ear. Shivers go up and down her spine. Aroused, Michael cups her breasts through her blouse. It is only then that Sharon works up her courage to speak, "There's something that we need to talk about. I'm pregnant."

Like a knife through her heart Michael's next words cut her deeply, "Who's the father?" Sharon stumbles backwards, away from the stinging words. Just as quickly she gathers herself again and pushes angrily at him then flails her fists, hitting him again and again. She screams at him, "You bastard you! How dare you say such a thing to me!" Michael calmly grabs her wrists. He holds her, so that she can not hit him anymore. With no more feeling than a stone he feigns an apology, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. It was just a test. I had to be totally sure," He excuses. Relieved, Sharon throws her arms around his neck. "How could you ever doubt me? I love you. I could never cheat on you," she pledges to him.

There is an intensity to their lovemaking that night unlike anything they have shared before. It's as if they know that it will be the last time that they will be together. All night long the lovers toss and turn side by side. When Sharon awakes in the morning Michael is gone. The taste of bitter brine seems to wash over her each time she remembers Michael's words, "Who is the father?" a terrible and ugly test is all ... she tells herself. Under a cloud of doubt and mistrust Sharon labors with the question, "What good can come of loving a man who could say such a horrible thing to her?" In her

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heart of hearts she knows the answer, "No good can come of it."

When Sharon arrives at work the rumors are already flying around the hospital about why Michael had suddenly quit his job. Not wanting to fuel the fires Sharon pretends that she is unaffected by his leaving. To her this is just one more disappointment in a life which has been filled with them. A life without color.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 18
A CRUMBLING SHANGRI-LA

After a full night of making love to his beautiful wife the D.A. is inclined toward sleeping in this morning, but that is not going to happen. A pillow pummeling him in unison with his wife's laughter rousts him from his slumber. Bradley snatches the impotent weapon from Janet's grasp, rolls away from her and attempts to go back to sleep. A full belly laugh warns him that his wife is up to no good. Diving across the bed and onto Bradley's back Janet begins tickling her husband. He laughs and wiggles across the bed. Though he tries to evade his wife Janet is persistent in her playfulness and he has little success this morning. Taking a different strategy he pulls her into his arms and kisses her. Janet pulls away and looks at him. "Ugh!" she teases. "You could at least brush your teeth before kissing someone first thing in the morning." They laugh and again roll around on the bed in each other's arms. The two lovers roll off of the bed onto the floor. "Ow!" they cry out simultaneously then laugh some more.

Bradley has to work today, so after their fun he leaves Janet on the floor and heads to the bathroom to get ready for work. His eyes are closed as the shower waters cascade over him. The door to the shower stall opens. A naked Janet climbs in all so cautiously beside him. "Is there room for two, sailor." she kids. "I haven't brushed my teeth yet." Bradley warns. "Neither have I," Janet answers wrapping her arms around his neck then she kisses him all so passionately. Their hands roam all over each other's bodies. They devour each others lips and tongues. The waters beat down upon their bodies, seemingly in rhythm to their heart beats. Bradley

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presses his body tightly against his wife's body and her back is pressed against the shower wall. Tenderly he lifts one of Janet's legs and wraps it around his hips. A moan escapes her lips as he enters her ever so slowly. They move faster and faster against one another until they seem to melt into each other's very being.

Both drag through their day, distracted by the memories of the very special birthday and morning after surprises.

For the loving couple Saturday comes all too quickly. Today they would have to share one another with their friends, Cynthia and David.

Pots and pans clang in the kitchen as Janet prepares dinner for the four of them. Bradley puts out snacks for the Raven/Steelers game in the living room. Calling into the living room Janet reminds Bradley to put out the coasters. Too often he and Dave have stained the living room table with their beer cans while watching other games.

As the pre-game show starts the doorbell rings. "Do you want me to get that?" he calls out to Janet. Laughing, Janet shakes her head and shouts back, "No. Why would I want you to get the door? You just sit there, three feet away from the door and I'll stop cooking my six course meal, walk thirty feet and answer the door." Bradley sits not moving. "Okay," he teases. Janet steps through the kitchen door and tosses a soup spoon across the room at Bradley. "If you don't get your butt up out of that chair and answer that door," Janet threatens. Without further urging Bradley sprints to the door.

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Opening it he finds Dave and Cynthia standing there snapping at one another. Dave pushes by Bradley and into the house. "Did I miss much of the game?" Dave wants to know as he crosses the room and plops down in front of the large screen TV. Beckoning Cynthia in Bradley takes her coat then turns and walks toward Dave. "The pre-game show is just starting." Cynthia heads out to the kitchen. "I take it you have poor Janet slaving away in the kitchen?" Cynthia accuses as she crosses the room. "She gave Consuella the day off, insisting that she is up to cooking one meal. I thought it might lift her spirits," Bradley explains. "Well I'm here now. I'll keep an eye on her." Cynthia offers. "Please make sure that she doesn't over do it." Bradley suggests, having not heard a word Cynthia has said because he's started watching the pre-game show. After entering the kitchen Cynthia closes the door behind herself.

The sloth like Dave has slung his coat over the back of the couch and crouched down upon the floor. Picking up Dave's coat Bradley then hangs up both coats and joins Dave on the floor.

Hunger pangs sends Dave grabbing for a slice of pizza and gobbling it down ravenously. To wash down the pizza Dave guzzles a full can of beer down in only a few gulps. The now contented friend begins to settle into the game. Wearing a half smile and shaking his head in mild disapproval of Dave's piggish ways Bradley picks up the second beer which Dave had started to drink and places it on a coaster. "Sorry," Dave is quick to apologize. Their attentions go back to the game which is about to begin.

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Approximately an hour has passed since the game began. The Steelers lead 17 to 10 mid-way through the second quarter. Each time the Ravens get the ball Dave curses the fact that Baltimore has gotten a failing team instead of an expansion team. The door to the kitchen opens. Cynthia and Janet enter the living room. "Who's winning?" Cynthia asks. A sullen Dave answers, "The Steelers. 17 to 10." Cynthia slides down onto the floor next to Dave. Leaving the couple Bradley climbs up onto the couch. Happily Janet squeezes in tightly against him. Tenderly Bradley kisses his wife while wrapping his arms around her. A cheer bursts from Cynthia and Dave when the Raven's intercept the ball. For the moment Bradley's attention goes back to the game then just as quickly it returns to Janet. A sigh escapes Janet's lips as her husband rubs her tummy. Hearing Janet's sigh Dave looks up. "That's how she got that way in the first place," he jokes. Husband and wife only laugh at their friend. Contented Bradley continues caressing his wife. A puzzled Cynthia looks up at her friends and inquires, "Can anyone tell me what can a pregnant woman and her husband do to celebrate a birthday that is so private that they have to exclude their best friends?" The twosome only laugh heartily at Cynthia's question. This only serves to feed her curiosity all the more. "It must be pretty juicy judging by your reactions." Cynthia continues fishing for an answer. "You may as well tell me now because you know that I am going to keep after you until you do."

she insists. The two of them again laugh and say nothing.

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Wanting to get more comfortable Janet stretches her legs out on the couch beside Bradley. Wrapping his arms around her waist Bradley pulls his wife ever closer. Reaching down he rubs her tummy again. "Umm. That feels good." Janet purrs like a contented kitten. A nervous cough escapes Dave. "Are we in the way ?" he asks. Janet takes a pillow from behind her head and tosses it down at Dave.

"Everything isn't about sex, Dave, but you'll learn that after you and Cynthia are married." Janet predicts. You can almost see the quick quip forming in Dave's mind. Thinking better of it when he sees Cynthia shooting daggers at him with her eyes he instead halfheartedly nods his head in agreement.

The loving husband slides down the couch until his head rests on his true love's tummy. The father-to-be hears a gurgling sound resonating in his ear. A moment later he asks Janet if it is her that he hears or the baby gurgling. Quickly he realizes how silly a question it is. The others laugh at him.

The light mood changes when Bradley looks up at Janet. Believing he recognizes a twinge of pain in her eyes he asks, "Are you alright?" Janet tries to reassure him, "Everything is fine." Leaning down she kisses Bradley's eyelids. All too easily he is reassured by a kiss. Still a little concerned Bradley admits, "I want this baby, but not nearly as much as I want to share the rest of my life with you." Showering his face with a flurry of kisses Janet then promises him that everything will be fine with her and with the baby.

Just when Bradley is about to cross examine his wife further their friends let out a ruckus cheer. The

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Ravens score. Janet half smiles, so Bradley thinks maybe it's better if he doesn't press her.

The Raven's lose the first game 24 to 20. Uninspired by the Raven's losing performance Dave and Bradley settle into the second game of the day.

Meanwhile Cynthia and Janet have deserted them. The women have gone back into the kitchen to check on dinner. More accurately, Janet is checking on dinner and Cynthia is keeping watch over her friend. In some ways Cynthia is envious of the domestic skills of her friend, but this life is something Cynthia isn't yet ready to attempt. Stirring the contents of one of the pots Janet looks over at her friend. Sitting on the kitchen counter Cynthia holds a glass of wine in her hand.

Unnerved by the way her friend is watching her like a hawk Janet finally turns and asks, "What?!" Cynthia begins, "So. What is the big birthday surprise?" Janet shakes her head and laughs. This friend is persistent if nothing else. "I'm not going to tell you," Janet assures her. A relentless Cynthia is just as confident that her friend will. "Each time your birthday is mentioned you and Bradley wear these silly grins on your faces." Again Janet lights up with the silly grin that Cynthia speaks about. "There. That's what I'm talking about. Now give girl, because I'm not going to stop bugging you until you do," she badgers her friend. Finally Janet surrenders. The truth is she is dying to tell someone. Why not her best friend?"Bradley calls me down the stairs to the living room. When I get there to my surprise he is standing in the center of the room wearing nothing, save a red ribbon tied into a bow." The two friends laugh. The image of her boss

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standing there in the red bow flashes through Cynthia's mind, she smiles. "You're kidding." Cynthia can barely believe this of her conservative boss. Janet shakes her head up and down confirming the truth of what she has said.

In the living room Bradley's mind is far from the game. He is more concerned about his wife. The worried husband looks to Dave for reassurance. "Did Janet seem her usual self to you?" Putting down the beer he holds Dave turns his attention to his friend. "She is her ever delightful and charming self as usual. Don't go borrowing trouble," he advises his friend. "You're just suffering the my wife is pregnant blues. This will pass," Dave tries to belay his friend's fears. At that moment the Detroit Lions score against the Dallas Cowboys. Dave yelps with joy. "I hate the Cowboys." Dave notes. It is too difficult for Bradley to feign any interest in the game. His mind is in the kitchen with the woman he loves.

A pensive Cynthia feels as though she has been dancing on eggshells. Unlike her usual approach of diving straight in she searches for an indirect way to bring up the subject of her friend grimacing in pain earlier. She had noticed that her friend had turned away from Bradley. It was an obvious attempt to keep her discomfort from him. It is also clear that Janet doesn't want anyone to know how much pain she is truly experiencing. The friend is sure that Janet is in need of someone to confide in. "I'm the family friend, your friend and Bradley's, so if you need someone to talk to I'm here for you." the lawyer tells her friend. "As an attorney I am required to keep confidences," she continues. Busying herself with the meal Janet tries to ignore

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her friend. Letting things go was not Cynthia's way. "I saw you in the other room, grimacing in pain earlier. Can you let me in? What's going on with your pregnancy?" Cynthia must know.

Feeling like an animal cornered by a hunter Janet takes a defensive posture. "I don't know what you mean!" Cynthia smiles and shakes her head. Realizing that her friend is only trying to help Janet decides to let down her guard and open up to her friend, but how can she help? Janet wonders. Help ... how can she even understand? Most women are willing to risk all to give this precious gift to their husbands and to their own lives. After all Cynthia is the consummate career woman. It is all too easy for Janet to downplay the risks when she thinks about the fact that she wasn't supposed to be able to conceive again and that this may be her last chance. It is all too easy. How can she talk to her career oriented friend about such things? Can she trust her to keep her confidence? But what choice does she have? She has to talk to someone. The strain of keeping this to herself isn't good for her or the baby. Hesitantly she begins to unburden herself, "If I tell you this you must promise me that you won't tell anyone. Not Dave and especially not Bradley." Cynthia takes Janet's hand in hers. "Of course I promise," is her reply.

Unsure if she is doing the right thing Janet looks away from Cynthia as she begins, "Sometimes, only some of the time, I hurt. I hurt really bad. I'm so afraid, Cynthia." It is hard for Cynthia to understand why Janet is taking this kind of risk. "You can put a stop to this," she reminds her friend. "You don't understand. I'm not afraid for myself. It's my baby I'm scared for. I'm scared that

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I won't be able to carry my baby to term." Janet clarifies. "This could be my last chance to be a mother," she reveals her deepest fear.

Why would anyone risk their life to have a child? Cynthia doesn't understand. She wants to have children someday, but to be willing to die trying ...? "Couldn't you guys try again? After all the doctors were wrong once," she tries to reason with Janet. Her pleas fall on deaf ears. "This could be and probably is my best and my last chance," Janet repeats what she feels in her heart.

"Where is the reasoning ... ?" Cynthia wonders. Janet wonders what kind of woman wouldn't understand why this is so important to her. The friend believes that as a lawyer she should be able to find an argument to sway Janet from this dangerous folly. Back and forth the two go in their minds. Janet wonders, "How can being a lawyer be enough for her friend?" Then Janet announces to her friend, "We are going to have the perfect life," Janet continues, "God didn't give us this second chance just to take everything away from me," she rationalizes. The skeptic friend wasn't sure if she believes in god or not, but she wonders why those who do expect him to protect them from their foolish choices when they spit in the face of logic.

Looking at Janet the friend can see resolve in her eyes and wonders still, if just maybe reason is best defined as understanding that for great rewards one must be willing to take great risks.

The door to the kitchen opens and Dave and Bradley walk in on Cynthia and Janet's conversation. The tension in the room is thick enough to cut with a

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knife. The two men freeze at the door. In an attempt to break the tension Bradley chides the women, "What are you hens clucking about? " Everyone except Janet laughs. The women don't answer so Bradley asks again, "What did we interrupt?" Cynthia is quick to cover, "Just girl talk." She then marches toward Bradley with her fists up. "What do you mean calling us hens?" she jokes. Like a child at play Dave wraps his arms around Cynthia. "Woo, tiger. Don't beat him up." They all laugh. Little did any of them know that their childlike joy would soon be over. In this time of joy and innocence it is hard to imagine that their Shangri-La is crumbling.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 19
THE SENTENCE

Much like a convicted felon awaiting sentencing Sharon sits waiting outside her doctor's office door afraid to enter. She knows that there is no turning back. All she can do is hope. Trembling with fear she opens the door and enters. The nurse and patients all greet Sharon warmly. The warm greeting does help to quiet her fears for a moment.

Mrs. Brakowski is pregnant for the third time yet still she bubbles over with joy at the prospect of another child. The soon to be mother of three talks about how her other two kids get a kick out of listening to her tummy. Laughing with pride she is a little embarrassed that her husband isn't a little more practical. She tells her friends here how he took the light bill money and bought cigars to hand out to their family and friends.

The laughter resonates throughout the room when she admits that at first she had gotten so angry with him that she broke a handful of the dreadful things over his head.

It is wonderful to hear the happy stories about the other women and to forget why she is here, even if only for a moment. The nurse, Cheryl, finally calls Sharon's name. Sharon's legs feel as though fifty pound weights are tied to them as she makes her way back to the examining room.

Taking a gown from Cheryl, Sharon walks behind the screen and changes. The examining room clock seems like a ticking bomb. The exam table feels like rolling waves. Her anxiety is now feeding her imagination and her imagination is running totally

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amok.

After what seems like a lifetime to a frightened Sharon her doctor finally enters the room. "How are you doing this morning?" Harrison asks. He isn't really expecting a reply. Fighting back her tears, Sharon manages to answer, "Like the Angels of Happiness and the Demons of Despair are at war for my soul and the truth be known the demons are winning."

Unsure just how to respond Dr. Harrison turns his back to Sharon and begins to busy himself going over her chart.

It is a bit of irony how calmly Sharon had watched as the same doctor had reviewed hundreds of charts of other patients, but now that she is the patient she is anything, but calm. He tries to fill the awkward silence with idle chatter, but Sharon would stare right through him and he quickly went back to her chart. No longer could he put it off. Harrison had to tell Sharon why he had asked her to come in today. "I want you to understand that at this point in your pregnancy you still have options," he is nervous as he speaks. "Why don't you just tell me what the hell is going on?" Sharon pleads with him. Tears well up in her eyes as her tiny fists pound against her doctor's chest. "What's wrong with my baby?" Sharon has deduced and demands to know. Capturing her fists in his hands Dr. Harrison pulls her close to him, in an attempt to comfort her. Sharon will not be comforted. Tearing herself free of his grasp she steps away. Glaring at him with great contempt she commands of him, "Don't comfort me! And don't bullshit me! Just tell me the truth!" she screams.

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The door opens and Cheryl peeks in wearing an expression of concern. "Can I help?" she asks. The would-be-mother twirls in Cheryl's direction and unleashes her fury upon the unsuspecting young nurse. "Mind your own damned business!" Harrison waves Cheryl out. "Everything is fine. Sharon is just a little upset," Harrison assures his nurse. Hesitantly Cheryl pulls her head from the room and closes the door after herself.

Taking Sharon's arm Harrison eases her back down onto the examining table. "You have to calm down. You're not doing yourself any good becoming hysterical," soothingly her physician speaks to her.

"The test that I did a couple of days ago indicates that there is a blockage in your tubes. Much needed nutrients were prevented from reaching your child. I'm afraid that the baby has probably suffered irreparable damage."

The floodgates break. A torrent of tears flow from Sharon's eyes. Her body convulses from the anguish. This woman is more than a patient to Dr. Harrison, she is like a daughter to him. Her pain is truly his pain.

A thousand reproaches haunt Sharon's thoughts as she now sits quietly. Was it her one time sluttish ways, her occasional lack of obedience, her lack of religious convictions, has any of this been a good enough reason for god to punish her so ...?

"I don't want to hurt you, but there are some things you need to face. If you proceed with this pregnancy your child will be born severely retarded, so much so that it's unlikely that he will ever be able to

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care for himself." Sharon interrupts. "Why are you doing this to me?" Her head bows low and she sobs. "All I am doing is giving you the facts," Harrison assures her. Wiping the tears from her face she laughs cynically. "It finally all makes sense. This is all a bad joke. It has to be. No one deserves all the heartache I've had in my life," she tells Harrison. Her doctor shakes Sharon gently. "Stop It! This is no joke; unthinkable and cruel, definitely, but it's a reality that you have to face and deal with," he instructs her.

The laughter stops. "What can I do?" a blank faced Sharon asks. "You're still in the first trimester. You can abort your pregnancy," is his answer. As Sharon rages she accidentally knocks over a beaker which had sat on the table next to her. The beaker breaks and the metal instruments inside clang onto the exam room floor. "Nooo.!" Sharon screams. The door swings open again. Cheryl stands there agitated. "What the hell is going on?" she demands. The nurse spies the broken beaker and the instruments scattered around on the floor. "An accident. Everything is under control now. Can you tell Wally to come in here and clean this mess up?" the doctor asks. "I think it would be better if I stayed." Cheryl advises her boss because she is uneasy. "That won't be necessary. Just send Wally in. We'll use exam room two for the remainder of the day." The doctor tells Cheryl. Shaking her head in disapproval Cheryl leaves out.

"Feel any better ... after breaking the beaker?" he asks. "You tell me that I should kill my baby and I should feel some remorse over a damn shattered beaker?" Sharon asks sarcastically. "I'm not telling you what to do. Only you can make that decision. What

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I am telling you is that you have that option," the message is clear, it is his recommendation. "Your child will probably have no understanding of what it is to enjoy life. He or she will be dependent on you for all of their needs," brutally he bombards her with all the arguments in favor of aborting this pregnancy. If Sharon didn't know him so well she would have thought that he was too strong an advocate for this abortion, but because she knows that he cares about her she believes he is simply advising her as well as he can under the circumstances.

Confusion settles over her mind. How could no life at all be what's best for her child? Never to smell the fragrance of a newly blossoming flower. Never to feel the cool wet rain upon his face after a blistering Summer heat wave. Never to know a thousand other tiny pleasures that add up to a full and happy life. How could she deny her child the opportunity? Yet, how could she sit by and watch day after day, as he stares unappreciative of the wonder that is life while not even understanding what it is that he is missing?

The distressed mother-to-be has mostly believed in God and in his goodness, but she can't help but look back on her life and asks herself, "If there is a god where has he been in my life? When has he shown himself to me? Why do the innocent suffer so much while the wicked prosper?"

The hands of the clock on the examining room wall sound tick - tick - tick. An epiphany, so like a flash of lightning, bright and painful, but all too clear comes to Sharon. Each tick of the clock brings her closer to the crossroads at which she must make

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a decision. Which road will she take?

The father of her child is a callous man, who has used her for his pleasure then was gone. Then there is her mother, whom she has never been able to please and who has used every opportunity to point out her disappointment in her daughter's choices, so she may as well had been gone. Then there is Clarice, who has proven to be a true friend. Sharon can't help, but wonder if that friendship will be enough to keep her from drowning in this tidal wave of despair.

Thousands of would-be-mothers visit their doctors this day. Most of them leave with their hearts filled with joy. For a moment Sharon imagines that she is one of those mothers and she smiles.

Regretfully, reality is quick to catch up to her. Tears fill her eyes and a veil of misery envelopes her soul because she knows the truth of her visit and what her cruel sentence must be.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 20
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

The often hurt and disappointed Sharon thought of friendship as a salve to ease life's pain while love is the cure - all. Love will replace the pain and disappointment with joy and fulfillment. After knowing Clarice she realizes that there is no true friendship without love.

A truer friend than Clarice to Sharon no one is likely to find. It is Clarice who was first to warn Sharon about Mark. Foolishly she had chosen to ignore her friend's warnings. Being a true friend Clarice doesn't mock her with "I told you so's" when it ends. Instead she lends her a shoulder to cry on.

An eerie silence shrouds Sharon's living room where Clarice sits waiting for her friend to return from the kitchen. Now entering the room Sharon carries a tray. On the tray is two glasses of milk and some sandwiches. Looking up Clarice sees that her friend's hands are full. "Can I help you with anything?" she offers. Shaking her head no Sharon assures her friend that she has it all under control. Placing the tray down upon the table beside the couch Sharon then sits down, joining her friend. "Didn't you have a doctor's appointment today?" a concerned Clarice remembers. It is then that Sharon begins to cry. Angry at herself for not being stronger Sharon chastises herself. "Damn it! I said no more tears."

Hugging her friend close Clarice tries to comfort her. Sharon nestles her head against her friend's shoulder and all of her burdens seem to drift away. A moment's reprieve is all she is going to know. One single moment to reflect on why she had fallen for a

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person as shallow as Mark? When you try to capture a bubble you will always be disappointed. Not that Mark was unobtainable, but what Sharon wanted from him, to be loved unconditionally, was not in Mark any more than it seemed to be in her mother. "Don't cry. He isn't worth it," Clarice instructs her friend. A bitter laugh Sharon offers in answer as she pulls away from her friend. It is hard for Sharon to not be flabbergasted by her friend's assumption. "You must be kidding. I'm not crying over that bastard. He's last year's bad news," she informs her friend. "Then what's wrong?" Clarice asks. An upset Sharon bounds to her feet. Back and forth then forth and back she paces. "You're scaring me," a concerned Clarice says. Getting up the friend walks over to Sharon. "Please tell me," she pleads. The words that follow rip at Sharon's heart like a jagged edged blade. "The doctor said that my baby will be born severely retarded." Clarice's hand goes to her mouth. She stifles back her own tears because she knows that she must be strong for her friend's sake. "How bad can it be?" unthinking she asks. "He wasn't graphic, but it's very bad," Sharon answers.

Sighing in resignation the friend asks, "Do you want a drink?" Then before Clarice can answer Sharon heads across the room toward the bar. "I don't think that's such a good idea," Clarice warns her friend. "What harm can it do?" she asks her friend then continues on to the bar and pours herself a stiff drink. "What are you going to do?" Clarice asks. "I think that I'm going to have an abortion," Sharon answers in a robotic mono-tone. "Is that something that you can live with?" Clarice tries to make her friend exam her heart. "It's horrible. I can barely say the words, but what choice do I have? Can I sit by year after year watching my child oblivious to

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life?" At that moment it becomes crystal clear to her what she must do.

There comes a rapping at the door. The two friends look at one another. Sharon calls out, "Who is it?" An all too familiar voice replies, "It's your mother."

There can be no doubt that Clarice loves her friend - Sharon, but not enough to endure her mother with all else that is going on. "Oh god," not meaning to Clarice voices her discontent. Laughing Sharon heads for the front door. "You be good. She's still my mother," Sharon asks of her friend "Fates save us," Clarice mocks her friend. They both snicker as Sharon nears the door forgetting her terrible weight for a moment. "I'll be good if she is," Clarice promises as the door opens to Bernice.

Standing there with her usual frown is Bernice. The consistently belligerent mother steps into her daughter's apartment. "How are you this evening Miss Tomlin?" the young woman greets Sharon's mother, in an attempt to be cordial. Jealous of the relationship the two friends share Bernice refuses to return the courtesy. "You here again? If you girls would find some good men you wouldn't have to spend so much time together," the mother mocks their friendship. "I thought you knew. Sharon is my man," a laughing Clarice teases. Sharon laughs. Bernice glares at the smart aleck woman. Hugging her friend Clarice says her goodbyes and heads for the door. Walking with her friend to the door Sharon whispers, "I'm so sorry," to Clarice. "No need. I get to go home. You have to stay," Clarice reminds Sharon as she exits.

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Spinning around to face her mother Sharon is now the one who is glaring. "What?" her mother asks innocently.

The two women walk across the room. A drink sits on the bar. Bernice notices the glass and turns to Sharon. "You aren't drinking in your condition, are you?" she asks. "I had thought about it, but thought better of it." Sharon answers. "That is so like you, being irresponsible," Bernice scolds her daughter. "I don't need your berating today, so if that's why you're here you can head out that door right now," Sharon informs her mother.

"Was there some reason for this visit, mom?" Sharon asks in an icy tone. "We don't talk much anymore," Bernice begins. "That's because all you ever do when I see you is chase away my friend and hurt my feelings," Sharon states the obvious. "For two old maids the two of you are sure thin skinned," Bernice falls back into her familiar pattern. "You can't help yourself even when told," is all the daughter can make of their interaction. Her mother had always found some shortcoming to point out. When she got straight "A's" her mother complained she wasn't social enough. When she started dating, none of her boyfriends were good enough to please her mother. As Sharon reflects back on their relationship an annoyed Bernice interrupts her thoughts. "Sharon!" Bernice yells. Dazed, as if awakening from a dream, the unhappy woman answers, "Huh? What? I'm sorry. I was just remembering some things."

Shaking her head Bernice asks Sharon, "What's wrong with the real world? You girls don't have a man because you're looking for some fantasy man. Keep your feet on the ground and look for a man who does

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the same," she instructs her daughter. "If that's why you came over here, to belittle me and my friend, then you can turn around and leave!" To add an exclamation point to her statement Sharon points a finger toward the door. Upset by her daughter's attack upon her Bernice nearing tears defends herself. "Even though I disagree with you trying to raise this child alone I came over here tonight to lend you my support. What's my reward? You bite off my head because of some no account friend." Sharon doesn't let her continue. With a fiery anger Sharon unleashes the bottled up resentments of years pass. Striking out at her mother without mercy she recounts, "Lend your support, that's a bad joke. In my whole life you have never supported me in anything, least of all this, the most important thing in the world to me, having this child. Instead you tell me what a big mistake I will be making. Well, you'll be happy to know that I can't have this child." Sharon sobs out of control.

Reaching out to comfort her daughter Bernice is rebuffed. "Don't you dare!" is Sharon's response to her mother. Frightened, Bernice steps away. "I know you think that I'm being cruel, but sweetheart it's because I don't want to see you make the same mistakes that I did," she explains. Sharon shakes her head in disbelief. "How could this woman be so stupid?" Sharon wonders. "You don't even realize that the most hurtful part of my life is that my mother feels that I am some horrible mistake not to be repeated," she accuses her mother. "That's not what I mean," her mother defends. "Then what did you mean?" Sharon demands. It was her mother's turn to pace. "If you're thinking about ending your pregnancy then you must have began to think about

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the hardships of single parenthood," Bernice all so skillfully avoids her daughter's inquiry.

Felling defeated Sharon walks over to the bar and picks up the glass. "You're always jumping to conclusions. Usually jumping in the wrong direction." she answers.

Raising the drink to her lips Sharon gulps it down. Turning to her mother she asks sarcastically , "Can I get you one Bernice?" Hurt, Bernice reminds Sharon, "Don't disrespect me young lady. I'm still your mother." Picking up the bottle she pours another drink then gulps that down. Again she faces the woman who has been more of a stranger than a mother and tells her, "You're not my mother. In fact you never have been. I could call you my incubator or if I was feeling generous I might call you my guardian, or my custodian, but never my mother." Sharon's words are like a slap in the face to Bernice. "What does a mother do that I haven't done?" Bernice asks, crying. With a cynical detachment Sharon answers her mother, "Loves their child unconditionally."

Turning and heading for the door is a hurt Bernice. "You don't want to stay for a drink?" Sharon adds meaning to be hurtful. At the door Bernice stops and turns to her daughter. "There are always conditions," Bernice tells her daughter then she turns the knob, opens the door and leaves out.

Pouring herself a drink and holding the glass up toward the door Sharon toasts her absentee mother. "That's what you're good at ... leaving when I need you most."

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 21
THE NIGHTMARE

When Bradley looks back on the most horrifying night of his life he wonders, "How could I have not known sooner? How did I let it happen?" but he also thought the same thing about many of the events which occurred in his life after that night.

The night began with Bradley on the phone ordering Chinese food. Sitting next to him on the couch Janet watches the news. Turning to her Bradley asks if she wants the same. Janet shakes her head. After ordering his dinner Bradley hangs up the phone and cuddles up close to his wife. "What did you eat today? " he asks, worried. "I don't need a nursemaid!" Janet becomes defensive. Seeing the hurt look on Bradley's face she is quick to apologize. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I'm just very irritable these days." She retires early. Bradley has fallen asleep in front of the TV set. Just before midnight he awakens then takes a sip from his beer. The beer is warm and flat. Tired and disgusted Bradley puts the beer down onto the table, gets up, turns off the TV then goes upstairs to join Janet in bed.

As he stands in the doorway of their bedroom he watches her as she sleeps peacefully. After crossing the room he climbs under the blanket next to his wife. Tenderly he kisses her forehead, wraps his arms around her then falls asleep.

It is 2:33 am when the serenity of the Dalton home is shattered by Janet's ear piercing scream, "Aeeeii . . .!" Never will Bradley ever forget waking to the flashing red numbers on the clock. Instinctively he pulls Janet closer. "What's wrong, baby?" he asks, petrified by fear. Calmly , but in

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pain Janet tells him, "Call Randall. Something is very wrong." Bradley sits up and dials the phone. He waits. "Randall, this is Bradley. Sorry to wake you at this ungodly hour, but something is very wrong with Janet," He informs his friend.

After Randall and Bradley talk the husband pulls the blanket back from Janet. For the first time he sees that she is bleeding. For a moment he freezes. Quickly he gathers his wits and eases his wife to the edge of the bed. "Can you sit up?" he asks. "I think so," is Janet's respond. The protective husband cautiously lets go of Janet. Going to the dresser he takes out a robe for Janet then walks back over to the bed and wraps the robe around his wife. He then helps her into her slippers and off of the bed. Before they leave the room he slips into his slippers at the end of the bed. As they leave the house he helps his wife on with her coat and puts on a coat himself. Once in the car Bradley pulls quickly out of the driveway and heads down the road.

Throwing caution to the wind he runs every red light he meets on the way to John Hopkins' Hospital. The screech of his tires announce their arrival at the hospital emergency room. After they stop he turns to Janet. "Darling you relax for a few minutes. I have to leave you alone. I have to go check on Randall and get some help to bring you in," he speaks softly trying to reassure her.

As Bradley climbs from the car Janet grabs his arm tightly and squeezes. "I'm so afraid," she confesses. "So am I, but everything is going to be alright. I promise." Bradley tries to convince his wife. Smiling Janet lets go of his arm. Swiftly he

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jumps from the car and runs toward the building. He almost knocks down two passerby's.

Inside the hospital chaos reigns. There has been a shootout between the police and two suspects earlier in the evening. Several of the wounded are being tended to in John Hopkin's emergency room. Police officers are watching over the "perps" and their fallen comrades. Nurses, orderlies, and doctors are running around in a panic.

Though rattled by the commotion Bradley has something to do. Disregarding the madness he pushes past people further into the emergency room. He stops at the security / reception desk. Many of the irate people in line shout obscenities at Bradley, but he ignores them and addresses the guard. "You have to hurry! My wife is very ill. I need someone to help put her in a wheelchair and bring her in," he shouts instructions. A woman in line shouts at the guard, "I've been here for two hours. He has to wait like everyone else." Whirling around Bradley glares menacingly at the woman. "My wife is pregnant and bleeding out in our car. Is your ache more urgent than that?" he asks. The woman backs silently away. The guard stands up. "I'm sorry, but you're going to have to bring your wife in by yourself, then you have to register and wait before anyone is going to see her," he tells the distraught husband.

Of course faced with bureaucratic bullshit and in a stressful situation like anyone else would have Bradley snaps. He reaches across the desk and grabs the guard by his collar. "My wife is outside scared, pregnant, and in a great deal of pain. I don't have time for your crap," Bradley menacingly answers. The

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guard easily peels the lawyer's hands away from his collar and stares sternly at him. "Believe me I understand what you're saying. That's the only reason I don't tear your head off, but you have to try and understand that I don't make the rules here I simply enforce them. The key syllable being force," he tries to intimidate Bradley. His tactics fail. Bradley stares him straight in the eyes and speaks as coldly as a graveyard wind. "Do you have any idea who I am? " Bradley asks. Without waiting for a reply he continues his tirade, "I'm Bradley Dalton, D.A. for Baltimore City. In case you aren't sure why that should concern you let me clue you in. If my wife isn't brought in and seen by a physician in the next two minutes I am going to sue you personally for everything you now own or ever will own then I'm going to sue every nurse and doctor on duty tonight and lastly I'm going to sue this hospital for so much money it will take over ten years for them to become financially solvent again, if ever.

The security guard grins at Bradley in total disbelief. In a sarcastic tone he mocks Bradley, "And I'm mother Teresa." From behind the guard an authoritative voice booms out, "That's good because it is going to take a miracle for you to keep your job." It is Randall. Dr. Randall Tisdale reaches the two men then shakes Bradley's hand. The guard looks at the unknown man, puzzled. "Thank god you got here!" Bradley exclaims. "These idiots ..." before Bradley can finish his thought the guard interrupts, "... and who are you, the governor?" Tisdale stares at the guard astonished at his stupidity. "No. I'm the head of pediatrics and the man who holds your job by a very tenuous thread," Tisdale threatens. A second guard whispers into the

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ear of the first guard then quickly leaves. The first guard is flustered. "I'm sorry sir. I was just doing as I was told to do." Tisdale starts to chew the guard's butt, "Was disrespect . . ." Bradley interrupts, reminding Randall that Janet is still waiting out in the car.

Hurriedly Tisdale barks out orders and two staff members, a nurse and an orderly, are sent on their way. Their first orders are to get Janet, secondly they are to find an exam room. The nurse, Morrison, tells Tisdale that there just aren't any rooms available. He instructs her to get a second orderly to clear off someone's desk and throw a sheet across it . . . pronto. The emergency room staff snaps to their tasks.

A short time later Janet sits upon the desk of Dr. Huster. Her doctor stands in front of Janet about to examine her. Bradley stands behind Morrison, who stands behind the wheelchair she had used to bring Janet into the hospital. Opening the housecoat of his frightened patient Randall immediately sees the bloody night clothes for the first time. Quickly he turns to Morrison. He barks out commands, "I want an operating room. Now! " the nurse looks at him helpless. "There isn't a single operating room available in pediatrics right now," she assures him. "I don't give a damn what department it is. Get me into an operating room immediately!" Timidly, Morrison agrees she will find one then leaves out. "Don't worry." the friend calmly comforts his patient. "I'm going to take good care of you." Janet smiles and nods her head.

A short time later Bradley sits alone. The hospital air conditioning is blasting frosty air. The lights

THE NIGHTMARE

are glaring bright. And at four a.m. in the morning the visitors lounge seems most like a ghost town. The coffee that Bradley sips on does little to warm his body and nothing to warm his soul. The creaking sound of the door at the end of the corridor brings Bradley's eyes up from the floor. Coming through the door is his two friends, Cynthia and Dave. Rushing across the room Cynthia wraps her arms around Bradley. She holds him tight. Unsure of just what to do Dave stands across the room from them staring at the pair. Finally he crosses the room and places his hand tentatively on Bradley's shoulder. Trying to break the tension Dave takes a crack at a little levity. "We would have been here sooner, but I made Cynthia put her face on so that she wouldn't scare Janet or the baby." The two friends stare blankly across at Dave.

The husband turns his attention back to his co-worker and friend. "What if something happens to her?" Bradley asks Cynthia. Dave leans down and picks up Bradley's empty coffee cup and tosses it into the trash can. "Can I freshen this up for you?" Dave asks. Bradley shakes his head no. Cynthia tells David to go get her and himself a cup of coffee. Relieved he turns and walks away. After Dave is gone Cynthia turns her attention back to her friend. "You can't let yourself believe the worst. The best thing that you can do for you and Janet right now is have faith that it will all work out," she advises him.

The tortoise like minutes creep by slowly, testing their faith and their patience. Each time the door to the visitor's lounge opens Bradley expects it to be Randall coming to tell them everything is going to be alright.

THE NIGHTMARE

Approximately eight a. m. in the visitor's lounge Cynthia is snuggled up close to Dave, asleep. Both Janet and Bradley's families have arrived. The two friends, Bradley and Dave are the only ones awoke. They stare blankly at the door to the visitor's lounge as if they can will it to open. Three other visitors of another patient sit across from them wearing the same empty drained expressions.

Finally the door opens. Randall enters. Exhaustion and defeat wears on his face. Dave shakes Cynthia waking her. When she looks into Randall's eyes she knows and begins to cry. The two men's shoulders slump as the regret filled friend grows near. He stops. His voice quivers with emotion as he speaks, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry." A tear rolls down each of Randall's cheeks. Assuming Randall is referring to the baby and holding out a glimmer of hope that some good still can be found in this day he asks, "... and Janet?" All Tisdale can manage is to shake his head, no. The pain consumes Bradley. His knees buckle under him and he weeps openly. Dave catches Bradley and holds him up. The husband wonders aloud as he stands there a wilted frame of a man, "How do you go on when you've lost everything that you value ... all that has ever given your life meaning?" No one has an answer.

There is no escaping the misery for Bradley Dalton. Everywhere he looks he sees ghosts of his life with Janet and the remnants of the promise of what their lives were to be. Friends nor family can console him. No words can ease his anguish. Marge Posey, Janet's mother, has to make the funeral arrangements for the double funeral of Janet and Samantha, they had named the unborn child.

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Agony distorts the fabric of time. It seems to Bradley as if an eon has passed since that horrible night, but it has only been five days, and now the day of the funeral is upon him.

A knock comes at the door. Unshaven and still in a robe he answers the door. When he opens the door he has to cover his eyes. He hasn't been out in the day or opened a shade in the house since his wife's death. After his eyes adjust to the light he sees Dave and Cynthia standing there. "Dear god! What have you been doing to yourself?" a hurt friend asks. Exasperated she forces her way into the house. Unsure David follows. He closes the door behind them. "Go away." Bradley pleads. Cynthia pulls Bradley by his arm. David pushes him from behind until they have moved him upstairs to the bathroom. Together they struggle to make him presentable. That is only the beginning. They have to convince him to attend the funeral service. Arguing with him Cynthia offers that he owes that much to the families and the memories of Janet and baby, Samantha.

In a stifling silence they drive to the graveyard. Even though the Woodlawn cemetery is huge you can see cars almost everywhere you look. It is a tribute to how much Janet was loved and by how many she will be missed.

At the double grave sites Bradley and Marge stand holding hands. The pallbearers, six carrying Janet's coffin and two carrying the small white coffin of baby Samantha, make the short walk from the hearses to the pedestals upon which they sit the coffins. Marge turns to her son-in-law and says, "No mother should have to bury a child, but it's a sin against nature for her to have to bury a grandchild," then

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she weeps.

A single car and three persons, Bradley, Cynthia and Dave remain. Alone Dave stands atop the hill, next to the car. Next to the coffins Cynthia and Bradley still stand. "A few days ago I asked you how could I go on. Do you have an answer for me now?" he asks his friend. From where he stands, atop the hill, Dave waves impatiently for Cynthia. She ignores him and answers Bradley, "Yes I do. One day at a time, healing a little more with each passing day until life is bearable again and a dim light flickers far in the distance." Tenderly she hugs him then takes his hand and leads him up the hill to car. "It's time to go," she tells him. Bradley wonders where and why.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 22
SLENDER THREAD

Four weeks have passed since Janet's birthday and ten days since the funerals. Like a man carrying an albatross Bradley drags through one day then another following the deaths, but he knows he can't continue on like this. There has to be a reason for going on. Leaving the city he drives up the mountain road toward the cabin he and Janet had shared. The wear and tear of recent days begin to tell. He nods off for a moment. In that single moment the car skids off the road and over some loose logs, this jars him awake. Instinctively he jerks the wheel to the left which takes the car back onto the road, barely missing a tree. At first he is relieved then he thinks, "The pain could have been over. We would have been together again."

Later, as Bradley sits in front of a roaring fire in the cabin and sips on a brandy, he thinks back over the days events. A split second slower or if he had turned the wheel to the right instead of the left. The fact that it would have happened on the way to their cabin, where they had shared so many happy times was almost poetic. The fire and liquor mercifully lulls him to sleep. One might think that sleep is the perfect refuge for a man with a broken heart, but Morpheus can be a cruel taskmaster.

Instead of escape Bradley's dreams are haunted by visions of an accusing Janet, pointing her finger and blaming him for wanting a child so much he had been willing to let her risk her life and their love. The liquor and heat envelopes him like an iron maiden, aiding the cruel god of sleep in his kidnapping. All Bradley can do is toss and turn. A baby cries, Janet accuses, and there is no escape.

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He goes further down this hallucinatory road. It leads him back to them again and again. A small leak in the roof rescues him from his terrible nightmares. It is raining. Right above his head there is a small leak. Plop, plop , plop ... until the persistence of the raindrops cut through the fog of the heat and alcohol then urges him from his slumber.

Afraid to go back to sleep Bradley sits up for the remainder of the night. Come morning light Bradley decides to leave the very modern amenities of the cabin and go down to the lake to bathe in the brisk Autumn waters. He hopes that the cold water will clear his head. It doesn't. It had been hard enough for him to try and deal with his loss, but the dreams added a wild card, guilt. How could he deal with his culpability in his wife's death.

After spending most of the morning dunking himself again and again into the icy waters of the lake, hoping somehow to be cleansed, Bradley gives up and returns to the cabin. How much easier it would be to get back into his car and head it straight into the tree which he had avoided the day before.

What could he do to erase these crazy thoughts from his head? Bradley decides that what he needs is to be around other people for a time. He drives into the nearby town. "I'll have a burger and watch a movie," he tells himself. As he exits the car he is swarmed by the townsfolk. The streets are more crowded than usual because the town is celebrating their Founder's Day. Weaving through the mass of humanity Bradley notices a disconcerting disconnection from the others. It was as though he were outside looking in at the world. A little girl,

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no more than five years old, goes skipping by. Her mother is only a few feet behind her. For a moment the girl looks familiar and the mother seems the image of Janet. He even believes he hears the mother call out to the girl, "Samantha. Sam." As if hypnotized he reaches out for the woman and the illusion is broken. The woman is startled and wary of the stranger. "I'm sorry," he quickly apologizes. "For a moment you reminded me of my wife," he explains. The woman smiles understandingly then they go their separate ways.

The movie house is empty except for Bradley. Everyone else is outside enjoying the festivities. Bradley sits there hour after hour watching a rerun of an old movie. Finally the house lights come up in the theater. An elderly man comes walking down the aisle. "I'm sorry mister. That was the last show for the evening. Actually the show before that was the last show, but I hate to close the theater until the last patron has gone. I wouldn't close it now if it wasn't for the fact that my wife is waiting for me. The family and I are all going to the lake to watch the Founder's Day fireworks. Look I know that you don't live around here, but you'd surely be more than welcome to join in on the festivities," the older man offers. "You look in need of a little fun," he adds, concerned. Smiling Bradley apologizes for holding him up, thanks him, but turns down his invitation.

The lost Bradley gets up and leaves out of the theater. Once outside he sees towns people lighting fireworks. Adults and children alike are running and laughing. It would have helped him to have joined in on the fun, but instead he chooses to roam aimlessly through the town. Without realizing it he has walked

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the five miles back to the cabin. Instead of going inside he wanders down to the lake. At the lake he sits down on the bank of the waters. From where he sits he can see over to the other side of the lake. There the townsfolk are still celebrating. One can barely make out the shapes of the people from this distance, but he is sure that he can see the mother and child from earlier. He even imagines that again he hears her call out Samantha. This has him imagining that he is holding Janet in his arms while baby Sam lies next to them.

Someone's loose boat floats down the lake and passes the heart broken man. Getting up he runs and dives into the water. The night waters chill him to the bone as he swims out to the abandoned boat. He climbs out of the water and into the boat. The weary soul lays down while the boat drifts for a time. Fire works explode over his head. Reason escapes him. All he can think about is how easy it would be to climb into the water, push the boat adrift then dog paddle there in the middle of the lake until he becomes too tired to make it back to shore. A small part of him is astonished to find that he is actually climbing from the boat and into the water. Yet when he pushes the boat away an eerie calm settles over him. There is little doubt in his mind that this is what he wants, yet he can't help asking himself, "How does this make sense of my loss?" When he can't answer he begins swimming to shore.

The night had come and gone. Bradley had fallen asleep on the bank of the lake. Once again surprised his dreams have been much kinder to him than the night before. It's the first time since leaving the hospital he awakens with a smile. Last night he had decided that it would be an insult to all he has

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loss to surrender to his pain. What he needs is something that will bring meaning to their deaths. It came to him. He had to save other unborn children to make up for not being able to save Janet or Sam.

Back at the cabin Bradley charges around like a man gone mad. First he tears the phone cord from the wall, which is unnecessary since no one knows he is here. He unplugs the TV. Then he tosses law books from the bookcase shelves into a pile onto the floor. From the desk drawers of the cabin's study he takes pens and notepads and tosses them onto the main room floor of the cabin, next to the law books. With a tiny bit more care he places his laptop computer next to the other study materials. Now he is ready to start.

Time passes unnoticed as he toils over volume after volume of the law materials. On occasion he will cross reference material in the books with other information he finds on the computer, but the law is a funny animal. More often than not finding the right answers begins with knowing the right questions. Bradley has few of either. One day goes by then another and another and so on and so on. More often than not he falls asleep on the floor with his face buried in a law book.

One particular morning the sun peeks through a broken shutter and dances upon his face. The warm sun gently urges him from his sleep. A grumbling stomach reminds Bradley he has been taking his personal care for granted. One of his law professors use to tell the students, "A hungry lawyer is a poor lawyer." Another trip into town for groceries and supplies is in order. The same little girl he had seen on Founder's Day sits on her tricycle as her

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big brother places his hands on the handle bars next to hers, one foot on the bar between the back wheels then shoves off with his other foot. The two kids laugh with glee. Their mother watches protectively from the porch of the town grocery store.

Once inside the store Bradley begins to grab items with little thought as to what he really wants. Food is just a tool, like a hammer or a screwdriver. He tosses things into the basket the store provides. Quickly the task is finished and he leaves the store. As he exits the store he sees the little girl again. This time she is off of her bike and running toward her mother, who is still on the store's porch. The little girl is screaming as loud as her small lungs can bear. "Mommy! Mommy! Stanley called me a witch! You told him to never call me that again," she reminds her mother. Stanley pushes pass his little sister. "Witch ain't a bad word," he insists. "It is if I say it is," the mother contradicts him. "My teacher gives me books with the word witch in them all the time," the young boy rationalizes. "When your teacher starts feeding you then she can tell you which words are bad and which ones are not. Until then words only have one meaning and that's whatever I say that they mean," she lays down the law. One meaning. It strikes him like a bolt of lightning. The lawyer drops his packages into his car as the simple exchange between the mother and her children seems to have given him what he had managed to overlook. The court has to accept more than one meaning for something as important as life. One week goes by and he has found nothing. Losing faith he's beginning to believe that this is all a waste of time. As frustration mounts he happens upon it, an obscure legal term. The description is all too brief so he cross-references

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it and finds more and more detailed information. After a couple of days Bradley is surrounded by notes he has taken and is convinced that he has found what he needs. Confident that he will now be able to find some purpose for his life despite all of the heartache, he forges ahead.

With the legal principle of "Irrebutable Presumption" he may be able to get the courts to overturn Roe vs. Wade and save the lives of many unborn children. His sabbatical is over. It is time to get back to work. His bags are packed and thrown on the backseat of his car. He takes one last look around the cabin retreat and thinks, "There is no reason for me to come here again. I came here to find a reason to go on and I did. For me, saving lives will be the slender thread that binds me to this life."

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 23
THE LINE IS DRAWN

It is driving Cynthia crazy that she nor anyone else has any idea where Bradley has disappeared to after the funeral. All the work she has taken on since he has been gone has helped to keep her mind off of all of the terrible possibilities.

Everyone in Bradley's office zip about the office place. Attorneys, paralegals and other support staff are all working at a fever pitch, covering for their beloved boss. Some shuffle files around. Others seem to be constantly answering phone calls. Everyone is doing everything that they can to keep things afloat until Bradley returns. Sitting at her desk Cynthia goes over her heavy caseload. She is trying to decide if she should abuse her newfound authority and drop some of this work onto her heavily burdened staff or should she use her feminine wiles to trick a rookey into taking on one of her more nuisance cases. For amusement and to relief some of the pressure she decides on the latter. Mark Stanton, the pigeon, was headed her way. Engaging him in a conversation then smoothly changing the subject to work she has gotten Mark to bite on the idea of trading one of his cases for the Milford case. As Cynthia is handing Mark the file William Lamp, a friend and investigator for the D.A.'s office, interrupts their exchange. "If it sounds too good to be true it probably is ..." A confused Mark turns to Lamp. He asks, "What are you talking about?" Lamp laughs then he explains that Cynthia is giving him a heavy work and no win case in exchange for his easy win case. Turning his back on Cynthia, who is still holding the Milford files, Mark stomps off angry and very annoyed with Cynthia and Lamp. The assistant D.A. turns and glares at Lamp. "Why did you do that?"

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that?" she asks. "Could I stand by and let you take advantage of that trusting young man? Could I?" he teases. "Besides, I asks you out, but you always say no," is his rationale. "That's because all you're interested in is sex," Cynthia answers. "Sooner or later I will get what I want," the cocky investigator assures her. Cynthia laughs at Lamp. "You

will never ... and believe me I can't emphasize this enough ... you will never have sex with me." Lamp smiles and advises Cynthia, "Lady, never say never."

The office games might have continued on for a while longer, but before the two even notice Bradley is suddenly beside Cynthia and Lamp. "Play time is over," he informs them. The startled friends are hysterically happy. Wrapping her arms around his neck Cynthia practically strangles poor Bradley with her hugs and kisses. Suddenly she let's go of him, backs away and glares menacingly at him. Striking out at him several times she slaps his arms. "You bastard!" She then starts to cry. "No one knew if you were alive or dead! How could you be so inconsiderate! It took me two weeks to get to sleep after you disappeared. I was so worried. I hate you!" Bradley pulls her into his arms and comforts her. "You're right. Everything you said is right ... except the part about you hating me. I'm sorry, but if I hadn't gotten away I would have gone crazy or worse," he explains. Cynthia slaps his arm again.

Laughing, relieved, she tells Bradley that she understands then jokes, "I don't hate you, but it'll

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be a long time before I love you again." The mushy stuff wasn't Lamp's style, but he had to admit that even he had been concerned and was glad to have Bradley back.

The warm welcome home was much appreciated by Bradley, but the thing foremost in his mind at this moment is going to work on overturning Roe vs. Wade. Making a grand sweeping gesture around the room he announces, "Good work while I was away, but I am back and there is no need for concern anymore. All I want to do is to get back to work." Many of his co-workers wear masks of doubt. Cynthia voices her discontent, "Maybe you should ease back into a full work load instead of just jumping back into the fires." Without saying a word Bradley takes the files from Cynthia's hands and puts them on the nearest desk. "I have a very special project and I am going to need your help with it," Bradley tells her. "And pray tell what happens to the heavy load I'm carrying in the meantime?" Cynthia wants to know. Unluckily for Mark he happens to walk by just then.

Taking the files, including the Milford case, Bradley hands them over to Mark. The attorney glares at Cynthia's unwitting accomplice, Bradley, but walks on silently. "I can live with that," is Cynthia's reply. Lamp and Cynthia burst into laughter. "I'm going to need you too," Bradley tells Lamp. The D.A. heads for his office. The two co-conspirators stand there unsure of what is expected of them. Turning around, Bradley asks, "Do you two need an engraved invitation?" The two co-workers are quick to follow their boss into his office. The door closes behind them.

THE LINE IS DRAWN

It is amazing to Bradley how sitting behind his desk and knowing that he has a purpose has given him back a sense of control over his life. The practice of law, even with all of its inconsistencies, is the one thing that he is confident that he can be sure of in his life. Across from him Cynthia sits while Lamp chooses to stand next to the door. Through the distractions of well wishers passing by and waving to him Bradley forges ahead. Looking at his two subordinates he says, "Irrebuttable Presumption." The phrase hangs out there for the others to contemplate. It is Lamp who breaks the silence, "What the hell is that?" Now that he has their interest Bradley is ready to begin, "Don't feel bad. I would bet that only a handful of attorney's or fewer have ever even heard the term. It's an obscure legal term which deals with a person or group of persons under the fourteenth amendment. In particular it deals with a singular definition for a person or group of persons when other viable definitions exist."

Cynthia lights up brighter than fireworks on the fourth of July. "You're kidding me? We're going to challenge Roe vs. Wade?!" she asks excitedly. "You and I are going to play in the deep end of the pool. Are you ready to swim?" he asks, Cynthia. "I was born ready," she assures him. There is one who doesn't share their enthusiasm for this battle ... Lamp. "And what part do I play in this three ring circus that you're planning?" Lamp wants to know. His boss explains to Lamp that he will need him to find a would-be-mother and a doctor for him to prosecute.

A knock comes at the office door. Opening the door Lamp allows Dave to enter. Hesitantly Dave walks in.

THE LINE IS DRAWN

Surprised, he greets Bradley, "Hi. I was just told you were back?" He walks across the office and offers his hand to Bradley. They shake hands. Bradley explains to Dave that he had needed some time to himself, but now he is back and ready to work. It is all Dave can do to keep himself from telling Bradley that he thinks it is foolish for him to return to work so soon. Instead Dave turns to Cynthia. "Are you ready?" he asks. "Ready for what?" Cynthia inquires, puzzled. An annoyed, Dave answers angrily, "Lunch! We are suppose to be going to lunch." Again she has forgotten. "I'm sorry. I can't believe that I forgot our date again. Can you forgive me?" she asks. "It's just that we have a big case that we're about to start working on and I'm not going to have time today." Lamp and Bradley look away, as if that somehow provides the couple with a degree of privacy. Dave huffs and puffs, but he knows that nothing is going to change his girlfriend's mind. "I understand," he surrenders. "You're not just the best guy, you're the best friend a woman could have," she smiles and hugs Dave. "... so handsome, so studly. Did I say understanding?" she cajoles him. Dave shakes his head. "I'll make it up to you tonight," she promises. Still unhappy Dave frowns. Cynthia jabs him in his ribs with her index finger because she knows that he is ticklish. Unable to help himself the boyfriend laughs. Wanting to get to work Cynthia ushers him to door. As she opens the door the others say their goodbyes.

"If the distractions are over with I would like the two of you to understand that as far as I'm concerned this is a war and the only way we can limit our casualties is to do our job fast and well. Anyone who isn't willing to work themselves to the

THE LINE IS DRAWN

bone please say so now." Bradley stares into their eyes and they stare back. They have an unspoken commitment to this cause. The line is drawn.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 24
CHANCE MEETINGS

Two mischievous women, Clarice has persuaded Sharon to play hooky from work and for them to treat themselves to a day of shopping. The mall is bustling with activity. Even though Sharon tries to keep her spirits high it is far too hard when everywhere she looks there are young mothers who are enjoying time with their new babies. In an attempt to distract Sharon her friend points out a pretty hat and a stunning dress. Although Sharon doesn't buy anything Clarice does. The friend buys two dresses and a very short and sexy nightie. The two friends sit in the mall having lunch. A very curious Sharon asks Clarice, "Have I missed something? Is there a new man in your life?" Clarice laughs. "No, but a girl has to be prepared just in case she gets lucky." The two friends share a much needed laugh.

Nearby the two friends a befuddled Cynthia wonders why is it that she had turned down David's invitation to lunch yet she was unable to put the persuasive Lamp off when he asked? The suitor nags and kids her until she gives in. As if hypnotized she finds herself sitting at a table in the mall having lunch with the sometimes annoying Lamp. Phil's Sausages is where they buy their lunch. Coincidentally Phil's is right in front of the area of the mall where Clarice and Sharon sit. In fact Cynthia and Lamp's mall table is right behind the two women. Across from Lamp, Cynthia stares at him and laughs. "I can't believe I'm doing this. I skip lunch with my boyfriend then I let you talk me into going out with you. A career making trial and I drop what I'm doing to play hooky for a Phil's sausage and French fries." Lamp grins a devilish grin. "You are here because unlike your wimpy boyfriend I

CHANCE MEETINGS

wouldn't take no for an answer. Besides, you and I know it isn't Phill's sausage that you're interested in," Lamp says suggestively. Again Cynthia finds herself shaking her head. She can't believe this man's arrogance. "You should be a writer," she tells him. "It doesn't make any sense to waste an incredible imagination like yours," she pauses. "... If you were the last man on earth ..." Lamp shushes Cynthia, placing a finger to her lips. He then leans backwards.

Puzzled Cynthia stares at Lamp. "What are you doing?" she asks. Shushing her again Lamp leans further back, eavesdropping on Sharon and Clarice.

Unaware that they are being spied on Sharon pours out her heart to her friend. "I think I've made up my mind. No. I have made up my mind. I'm going through with the abortion. I'm going by Dr. Harrison's office and schedule the procedure for as soon as possible." Believing that her friend is rushing into a decision she may not be able to live with later Clarice advises Sharon that she doesn't have to make this decision today. Confused, but determined Sharon explains to her friend that if she doesn't do this quickly she won't do it and she must do it, for her baby's sake. Reaching across the table Clarice takes her friend's hand into hers. Behind the two friends Cynthia is still trying to figure out why Lamp is eavesdropping on the two women. Dependable as ever Clarice tells Sharon that she will take the day off from work and go with her to the clinic whenever she has her procedure done. A look of relief washes over Sharon. Thankful that she won't have to go through this alone, but regretting that she can't count on her mother as much as she can count on her friend. The friends get up and walk

CHANCE MEETINGS

away.

Lamp turns to Cynthia. "Tell Bradley that the two of you had better find that friendly judge quickly because I think his mother-to-be has just been dropped into my lap." Without waiting for a reply he jumps up and follows after the two women. Once outside of the mall Sharon stops and searches through her pocketbook while Clarice waits patiently. Rushing out of the mall doors Lamp almost bumps into them. Casually he continues on for several feet before he finds a place to hide and look back for his prey.

Needing time alone Sharon tells her friend that she wants to go to the doctor by herself. The understanding Clarice leaves her friend standing alone in the middle of mid-town. Sharon walks on alone. So preoccupied is she that she doesn't even notice the stealthy Lamp trailing her.

Dr. Kirk Harrison's office is only a few blocks away from the mall. An uneasy feeling settles over Sharon as she walks so she looks back. Her paranoia is replaced with relieve when she finds nothing that seems out of the ordinary. If she had looked closer she might have noticed the guy who had been following her for the last ten minutes, but Lamp is good at his job, blending in. As she is about to close the door to Harrison's office she spots Lamp. For the briefest moment she connects him with the mall. The door closes and Sharon concludes that it is just her imagination running amok. It was just two chance meetings. After all, why would anyone be following her?

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 25
DIE IS CAST

The D.A. offices are dark and empty, except for Bradley's office, where he and Cynthia sit waiting for a phone call. The phone rings. Bradley answers it. It's Lamp. He explains to Bradley that he has found the mother-to-be, her name is Sharon Tomlin. He has also found the doctor, his name is Kirk Harrison. The detective goes on to explain to his boss that the abortion has already been scheduled for tomorrow at ten am. Bradley jots down some notes, hangs up the phone and turns to Cynthia. "We need to find a pro-life judge tonight who will rubber stamp the arrest warrant based on what we have. We want to save our fight for the court," he instructs Cynthia. "I've got just the judge," she assures him.

It takes Cynthia a few hours to find Judge McKinner. The judge is attending some charitable function. When she tells him what she wants he is more than a little annoyed, but agrees to talk to her in private in his chambers. About midnight Cynthia walks into McKinner's chambers. There McKinner sits behind his desk wearing a scowl. "You have a hell of a lot of nerve asking me for something like this," he scolds. Silently Cynthia watches him as he gets up and paces the room. "If Bradley is right. Think how many lives we can save," she points out. "And if he's wrong I look like a reckless fool," McKinner counters. "You know D.A. Dalton and you know me. We wouldn't be here if we didn't think we had a good chance of winning," she assures him. "Ignore a Supreme Court decision and issue you a warrant. It will be political suicide," he states more to himself than for Cynthia's benefit. By now Cynthia is thinking that this is a mistake. It seems unlikely that she's

going to get her warrant from McKinner and now it is definitely too late to look elsewhere. "If I'm not getting this warrant why did you ask me here sir?" she asks him. McKinner paces some more. The door to McKinner's chambers opens and his law clerk sticks his head in the door. "You asked me to meet you here, sir?" the clerk asks. "I may need you to draft a warrant for me," McKinner instructs him. A broad smile appears on Cynthia's face. The clerk takes his head from the office door then closes it. "Don't smile yet," McKinner cautions Cynthia. "I said that I may ..." He walks over to the window and looks out over the city. "Do you know what the most basic tenant of law is Ms. Blaylock?" he asks without looking at Cynthia. "I know what I believe it to be, sir." she answers. McKinner laughs. "Lawyers, always the cautious answer. It doesn't change Ms. Blaylock. The most basic tenant of law is protect those who can not protect themselves. An unborn child is the personification of that tenant. Not only can't they defend themselves they have no voice with which to even cry out in protest to being wronged. Unseen and unheard, it becomes easy to ignore their humanity, and makes it easy to accept not protecting them, but how do I justify writing this warrant?" he wonders aloud. This warrant isn't the end of the process. All you are doing is the very least the system owes these children. You're giving them their day in court," she reminds him. "There comes a time in everyone's life when you have to put up or shut up about what you believe in." He walks to his desk and presses the intercom button. "Charles could you come in here? ... and bring your notepad," he instructs.

For the next few hours Cynthia and McKinner work out the language of the arrest warrant. The clerk, Charles, takes notes. When the final draft has been

DIE IS CAST

completed Charles types it up and files it with the court records.

The judge sits at his desk. Across from him sits Cynthia. The clerk, Charles, has gone home. A reflective McKinner leans down and opens his bottom desk drawer. Smiling, he takes out two glasses and a bottle of bourbon. Reaching across the desk he hands Cynthia a glass then pours a healthy portion of bourbon into both of the glasses. "There's no backing down now," McKinner assures Cynthia. "I've sown the seeds now I will bask in the glory or reap the whirlwind," he states almost subdued.

The two co-conspirators sip on their drinks and contemplate the frenzy that is sure to follow.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 26
FIRST CASUALTY

No one will mistake Cynthia for a domestic goddess, but tonight she has made up her mind to subjugate her desires to those of Dave. He has been supportive and understanding in their relationship. The pork chops are simmering in brown gravy and onions. The mash potatoes have already been prepared and if she does say so herself there isn't a single lump in the bowl. A man could die happy just smelling her sweet corn bread cooking in the oven. It is going to be a meal to remember, she promises herself.

The doorbell rings. Apron and all Cynthia makes her way to the door. Being cautious she peeks through the peephole. Seeing that it's Dave she opens the door, gives him a hug then hurries back to the kitchen. As she disappears into the kitchen she calls back to him, "Make yourself comfortable. There's an unopened bottle of Courvoisier behind the bar if you'd like a drink." Dave calls back to her. "No thanks. I'll wait until you join me." Sitting in front of the TV Dave watches the evening sports, relaxes and waits for Cynthia. "God, you won't believe the day I had." He tries to relate his story to Cynthia. Interrupting him, she has a tale of her own to tell, "I was totally on my game tonight. McKinner wanted to turn me down, but I just wouldn't let him off the hook." This was a subject that Dave truly didn't want to discuss with her. He felt very strongly that Cynthia was on the wrong side of this issue. "I don't want to talk about your case," he speaks vehemently. "What's wrong with you?" Cynthia asks, coming out of the kitchen. "This mother has the right to do what she wants with her own body," he argues. "... and what about the baby's rights?" the lawyer questions. "It has no rights," he states oh so

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confidently. "At one time Whites said that about Blacks, that we weren't people that we were just chattel property in order to deprive us of our civil rights. This definition of life is just a legal ruse, a political compromise at the expense of people who have no political voice of their own," she rebuts his argument. Cynthia turns toward the kitchen. "Oh no! You had better not have made me burn any part of my meal," she warns him. Cynthia then runs into the kitchen. Getting up from his seat Dave follows her into the kitchen. The lady lawyer is bent down checking on her corn bread. Everything is fine. The cornbread is now golden brown while the gravy that the pork chops are smothered under has just come to a boil. Unnoticed by Cynthia, Dave has crept up behind her. An amorous Dave wraps his arms around her waist and pulls her close. Momentarily she surrenders to him. Suddenly Cynthia stands up and leans back into his arms. Softly Dave makes a trail of kisses down her sensuous long neck. A moan escapes Cynthia's lips. "David." she sighs. "I would like it better if you were moaning my name in the bedroom," he half kids. They both laugh. Removing Dave's hands from her waist Cynthia steps away from him. "Will you please get out of here before I burn our dinner." she pleads. A mischievous smile lights up Dave's face. "Would that be so bad?" he asks. Angered, that Dave didn't seem to appreciate the effort she was making Cynthia screams at him, "You're damned right it would be! After all the work I've put into this evening ...!" But just as quickly her demeanor softens. Turning Dave toward the kitchen door she pats him playfully on the butt and promises that they will have plenty of time later to fool around.

A short time later the two lovers sit quietly across

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from one another. Sumptuous is each and every bite. Melodic is every sound. Intoxicating is each sip. The piece 'de resistance is the promise in every glance. In anticipation of things to come Dave gulps down the last of his drink. Like a lion circling his prey he gets up and prances around the table to stand behind his woman, who is still seated. Tenderly he lifts her from the chair. Ready, she offers no resistance. Lovingly he carries her in his arms to the couch. Laying her on the couch he then kneels down beside her. Cynthia looks him in the eyes and says, "I told you there would be plenty of time for this." The mood is broken. Their earlier conversation echoes in Dave's mind. Now he seems distant to Cynthia. "Did you hear what I said?" she asks of him, annoyed. Still he does not answer. "Did you hear me!?" she screams at him. "Huh ? Did you say something?" Dave asks. "I asked you if there was something wrong," she repeats. Hesitantly Dave answers, "Naw ... it's nothing." It is obvious that he is lying and this angers Cynthia all the more. "You know that I hate it when you play this silly game. If you have something on your mind then let's talk about it," she insists.

The tension is so thick one needs an ax to cut it. "Oh boy. You know as well as I do that we don't talk about anything. When we disagree it always ends up in a knock down-drag out-war. I end up walking out, but worst of all Mr. Jimmy doesn't get to come out and play." Dave tries to lighten things. Cynthia is not amused. "What's more important, Mr. Jimmy or a healthy relationship?" she asks. David pauses. Cynthia hits him on the arm. "Stop joking and talk to me," she demands. "If you really want to go there." Dave starts. "I was thinking that the woman who is having the abortion. The one you and your

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boss are going after. I can't imagine the pain she must have gone through to come to that decision?" he says. Cynthia regrets having told Dave anything about the case. Now that he has brought it up she knows that she has to answer his charges. Still, this is a conversation that she doesn't particularly want to have. They talk for more than an hour. Neither giving an inch. Cynthia telling him that he wants to be politically correct, no matter what. She insists he is ignoring the bigger issue, a child's right to life. Not buying her argument David accuses her of carrying on a witch hunt for no other purpose than that of furthering her career. The holier than thou Dave accuses Bradley of carrying on a vendetta against anyone who dares to not value what Janet had given her life trying to possess. The argument becomes more and more vehement. "You resent the old boys club, but you want so badly to be a member. You think that if you play dirty you will earn their respect, but all you will do is lose your soul," Dave warns Cynthia.

There is too much truth in Dave's words. Cynthia doesn't want to deal with anything that might distract her from this fast track career case. Instead she tries to take Dave's mind away from their fight. "Why don't we just agree to be able to disagree," she said as she fumbles with Dave's belt, trying to undo it. He slaps her hands away. At that moment she is no longer the least bit attractive to him. Cynthia stares at him in disbelief. Dave heads for the door. "I have to go," he says as he opens the door. His very astonished lover shakes her head. "You're kidding? Right?" Cynthia asks. A Frustrated Dave tells her, "I don't think that you're the woman for me. Or maybe I'm not the man for you." Without giving Cynthia a chance to answer

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he leaves out. The door slams shut behind him. As soon as the door closes Cynthia crosses the room to the phone and begins dialing. Angry she screams at the door, "Forget you ... Mr. Self Righteous Prick. You are not the only man with a Mr. Jimmy. Besides, you weren't very good anyway," she makes fun of her former lover. Turning her attention back to the person on the other end of the phone she vamps, "This is your lucky day."

As she waits for her late night visitor to arrive Cynthia thinks about her and Dave's relationship. She realizes that their relationship is probably the first casualty of many more to come before this case is decided.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 27
THE ARREST

There are many problems associated with acts of spite. The hardest of which is living with the fruits of rash decisions. The next day, outside of the abortion clinic an unmarked police car is parked. In the car is Cynthia, Lamp and two policemen, Smith and McDonald. According to what Lamp had heard, while hanging from a windowsill outside of Harrison's office the day before, Sharon has scheduled her abortion for ten a.m. today.

The four co - workers watch up and down the street outside of the Light Street Family Planning Clinic for Sharon to arrive. Every once and a while Cynthia catches Lamp staring at her instead of the streets. At first she ignores him, but soon it begins to annoy her. At first she simply frowns at him then she hits him. McDonald and Smith laugh. An embarrassed Lamp decides to get even. "You didn't hit me like that last night," he reveals to the others. All Cynthia can do is shake her head. "I knew you were a bastard, but everyone is entitled to one mistake. You can be sure it's a mistake I will never repeat," she assures the gloating lover. Lamp mocks Cynthia, "I told you before, never say never." McDonald and Smith laugh. When Cynthia turns and gives the two cops the evil eye their laughter stops.

While they sit waiting the bickering continues. Finally Smith has had enough. "Will you please shut the hell up! The waiting is bad enough. I don't get paid enough to listen to the rest of this personal crap." Smith reprimands his superiors. It is suddenly dead quiet in the car.

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All day McDonald has wanted to say something. Smith's tirade has given McDonald the courage to say what has been on his mind. "Can anyone tell me why we are here? This is a waste of time. We can never get a conviction. Besides there are bad guys out there that we could be trying to arrest." Tired of the macho posturing Cynthia vents her anger on McDonald, "When you become the D.A. then you can decide which cases have merit in a court of law. Until then just do what the hell you are told."

A second wall of silence falls over the group. The policeman, McDonald is steaming hot, but he is smart enough to know that he can't win fighting with someone who has the power to have him back walking a beat, so he accepts the abuse in silence.

It is a suffocating silence that envelopes the car. Lamp decides to cut through it and get back to some degree of civility. "We have an hour before she's due to arrive. After we arrest her and the doctor we are probably going to be so busy with paperwork that we won't get to eat until later tonight, so why don't we get something now?" he suggests. Everyone agrees. It is McDonald who takes everyone's money and their orders. He goes to a sandwich shop a block away from the clinic.

While McDonald is gone the others alternate looking down at their watches and checking the street. The time is growing near. It is nine fifteen as Sharon and Clarice pull into the downtown parking facility. They have forty-five minutes before the would-be-mother's appointment and only a five minute walk to the clinic. An apprehensive Sharon leans back and takes a deep breath. Her friend smiles, understandingly. "I can do this." Sharon declares

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aloud. "If you truly want to ... yes you can," her friend offers her words of encouragement to strengthen Sharon's resolve. They sit holding hands.

Outside of the Light Street Family Planning Clinic Smith, Lamp and the assistant D.A. wait for Sharon's arrival and McDonald's return. The car door opens and McDonald climbs into the back seat of the car carrying the bags of food and drink. "Let's get at that," a hungry Smith says. The officer begins handing out the coffees and sodas everyone has ordered. He then rummages through the bag and begins to hand out the sandwiches. "Your cheese steak," he says handing Smith his sandwich. His partner thanks him and immediately begins to chow down. "... a ham and cheese for you," he hands the sandwich to Lamp. A quick thank you then Lamp joins Smith in enjoying his meal. Smiling mischievously, McDonald reaches into the bag and hands Cynthia a sandwich. "... and your fish sandwich," he laughingly offers Cynthia. Frowning Cynthia notices that the others are looking at them puzzled. His boss takes the sandwich. "Screw you McDonald. You know damn well that I ordered a turkey club sandwich," she accuses him. Smith and Lamp laugh. "Well the joke is on you because I'm going to eat this sandwich, but believe me unless you want to feel my wrath you are going to give me my money back," Cynthia threatens.

During the altercation between McDonald and Cynthia, the observant Lamp notices Sharon and Clarice heading down the street toward them. "Okay kiddies. It's time to go to work," Lamp instructs his co-workers.

The two women walk right by the car and never notice its occupants. They walk into the clinic and the

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door closes behind them. Quickly taking control of the situation Cynthia begins issuing orders, "We'll wait thirty minutes then we will rush in and catch them in the act." Laughing and shaking his head Lamp says, "No we won't." Cynthia glares at him and reminds him, "I'm the superior here." Lamp shakes his head again. "That was a good try, but Brad wasn't sure that you would follow his instructions so he told me, no matter what you might say, we are to enter that facility within fifteen minutes of the suspect entering. He also told me to tell you that we don't need another innocent unborn to die to make this case."

Meanwhile inside the facility Dr. Harrison is waiting for Sharon at the receptionist desk when she arrives. With a fatherly veneer he gives her a quick hug then asks, "How are you holding up?" A half smile creases her lips. "Barely, but that's good enough," she assures him. Sharon introduces him to her friend, "This is my friend, Clarice." The two shake hands. "I don't know if I would have had the courage to go through with this without her support," she says of her friend. "It's probably not the choice I would make," Clarice wants known. "... but it isn't my choice to make and my friend needs me." Harrison nods his head in acknowledgment of Clarice's disapproval, but support.

The doctor points to a comfortable chair in the waiting room so that Clarice could have a seat. "The procedure won't take long," he tells the two friends. The would-be-mother and her doctor turn their backs on Clarice. The doctor and patient discuss the procedure. Sharon signs the consent forms. Again Harrison returns his attention to the friend. "Are you going to spend tonight with your

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friend?" he asks of Clarice. Sharon looks anxiously at her friend. Smiling comfortingly, Clarice answers, "Of course I am."

A meticulous Harrison advises them, "Call me if there are any problems tonight. I mean it. Don't hesitate to call me then go to the nearest emergency room. I will meet you there." He reaches his hand out to Sharon. Though she is early he has no intention of making her wait around. "Okay young lady. Come with me." Hand in hand the patient and doctor, who seem more like father and daughter, head back to the procedure room.

Outside of the clinic the door to the unmarked police car flies open. The four co-workers exit the car and head straight for the clinic's front doors. Let's get this over with . . .," a reticent Lamp tells the others.

Inside of the clinic a security guard leans comfortably at ease against the wall nearest the entrance. The guard is startled when the doors to the clinic are flung open and bang against the wall. The partners, Smith and McDonald, lead the charge. Lamp and the assistant D.A. are right behind the two policemen. Wearing an expression of bewilderment the guard rushes toward the foursome with his baton at the ready. Smith stops, takes out his badge and flashes it in the general direction of the guard. "Sit your rent-a-cop ass down!" he commands. The fearful man stops, moves backwards then leans against the wall once more.

Their charge has raised such a ruckus that the facility director, Michelle Smart, has come out to see what is going on. There has been quite a few

THE ARREST

incidents of violence against the clinic by extremists pro-life groups in the last nine months. The director excitedly demands of the menacing strangers, "What is going on here?" Cynthia steps forward. In her hands she holds up the warrants for all to see. Without so much as an answer for the director she fires her own inquiry. "Do you have a Dr. Kirk Harrison here today?" Smart looks at the officer holding the badge then back to Cynthia. By her demeanor Smart can tell that Cynthia is the one in charge, so she answers her. "Yes." Then the clinic director again questions the assistant D.A., "What has he done?" This time Cynthia does answer the woman, but ever so vaguely. "All I can say is that I need you to take me to him." Michelle hesitates. "Now!" Cynthia demands. As the director of this facility Smart has dealt with Cynthia's type before. She is not easily intimidated. "He's with a patient," is Smart's icy reply. A cynical laugh escapes Cynthia's lips. "That wasn't a request. If you refuse you can and will be arrested for obstruction of justice and I will then go door by door until I find him anyway," she threatens. "How do you think your other patients will feel about that?" she asks.

A beaten Smart turns and leads the four of them down the hallway toward the procedure room where Harrison and Sharon are. Having heard everything Clarice follows close behind. They reach the room. Smart knocks twice on the door. A scream of outrage announces the intruders presence, which is Clarice's intent. "What kind of operation are you people running here?! Tell me, whatever happened to patient-client privilege?! How can you let these people violate that so easily?!" With the rage of a protective parent the friend steps toward assistant

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D.A.. Holding up her hand Cynthia warns Clarice to stop or be arrested. Like a mother protecting her cub Clarice knows no fear. Angrily she rants at Cynthia, "You don't scare me! In this country citizens still have rights. You little tyrant." Smith, Lamp and McDonald snicker. "Arrest her!" is the order that follows Clarice's tirade. McDonald leans over and whispers into his boss' ear, hoping to reason with her, "Ignore her. Let's just get the doctor and mother-to-be." A cooler Cynthia turns to the angry woman. "You are lucky that I don't have time for this foolishness today." She turns to Smart. "Open it!" The director knocks twice more then she opens the door and enters.

The others all follow her in. On the examination table Sharon sits wearing only a hospital gown. Instinctively she tries to cover herself. Harrison is standing as he is putting on a pair of surgical gloves. The doctor and patient are startled by the intrusion. "Dr. Harrison!" Sharon yells. He spins around. The doctor can not believe that the director would bring anyone into a procedure room for any reason. Barking at her he demands, "Have you lost your mind?!" No one is allowed in here now!" An insistent Cynthia steps toward Kirk holding out the warrant for his arrest. Choosing to ignore her he turns to Smart again. "What in heaven's name is going on? Who are these people?" The turn of events has Sharon visibly upset. "I don't know what's going on. All I know is that they have a warrant for your arrest." Michelle explains. Smith walks over to the doctor, turns him around and places handcuffs on him. Upset, Sharon begins crying.

Turning now to Sharon the assistant D.A. takes out a second set of papers. "Are you Miss Sharon Tomlin?"

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she asks. Now the distraught woman becomes even more agitated. Her voice is almost a whimper as she answers, "Yes." The cold mechanical woman instructs the mother-to-be in a harsh mono-tone, "These men are going to leave out so that you may get dressed. Here is a warrant for your arrest," she hands Sharon the second set of papers. The floodgate erupts. A torrent of emotions flow forward as Sharon breaks down. "Nooo! You can't do this to me! Why are you doing this? I haven't done anything. Damn you! Damn you! Why? Why?" Clarice pushes pass the policemen to reach Sharon's side. As she tries to calm her friend down the officers and Lamp leave out. Never did Sharon need a friend more than now. "Hysterics aren't going to help you right now. I'm going to read you your rights then those officers will return and place you under arrest. When we get to the station you can call a lawyer." Cynthia lays out her plans to the distressed woman. "What is this torture? When will it all end?" Sharon wonders.

Smart has deduced that this is some legal ploy to challenge a woman's right to an abortion. Taking Sharon's hand in hers trying to belay her fears she instructs the young woman "Don't worry." Quickly Michelle turns her attention to Cynthia, "You people ... you disgust me! I don't know what you are hoping to accomplish here today, but I assure you that we will fight you with all of the considerable assets at our disposal."

It was time to proceed. Cynthia opens the door and beckons her colleagues back into the room. "Don't worry Ms. Tomlin. The clinic has one of the best legal staffs in the country. They will represent you and Dr. Harrison, free of charge," Smart informs Sharon.

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The two strong women, Cynthia and Smart, face off. "You do what you have to do Miss Smart and I will do what I have to do," Cynthia assures her.

After Sharon is handcuffed the two policemen lead the two down the clinic hallway. Again Clarice pushes pass the officers. Whispering into her friend's ear she says, "I will follow you down to the station. Whatever you need from me I will do, so don't worry." Looking at the loving face of her dear friend Sharon can't help but believe everything Is going to be alright.

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The two policemen, McDonald and Smith sit at their respective desks typing up their reports. They each carefully color their accounts of the arrest, not wanting to be on the wrong side of the D.A.'s office. Their hearts aren't in the words that go onto the papers in front of them. What they would have liked to have done is to have protested the frivolity of the acts which occurred this morning. Hardened criminals are going without being prosecuted while a mother-to-be, who is doing what she believes is best for her child, finds herself caught up in the system. The two men question, "Is this why I joined the force ..." McDonald swings his arm out in frustration and anger knocking over his coffee by mistake. Some of the coffee splashes the few feet across the room and onto Smith. "Damn it!" Smith snaps at his partner. "I'm sorry. It's just that I hate it when these damned lawyers decide to go on their holy crusades and we're forced to arrest people who have never done anything wrong in their lives. Damned lawyers," he repeats in resignation.

In the dimly lit interrogation room Sharon sits across the table from Cynthia. Lamp stands at the door enshrouded in shadows. Strangely absent from this gathering is Dr. Harrison. The doctor is being held in a separate holding area. An eerie silence envelopes the room. They await Bradley and the clinic's lawyer. The D.A.'s office wants to be very careful. Besides, Sharon is too scared to speak. The door to the interrogation room opens and in walks the ominous figure of Bradley Dalton. Everyone looks up. Quickly Sharon averts her attention downward. "Is this the woman?" Bradley asks. Cynthia nods her head yes. "Where do you have the doctor?" the D.A.

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wants to know. "He's in a separate holding area. Just like you instructed," she answers her boss. Walking over to the table Bradley stands over Sharon. "Have they called their lawyers yet?" he inquires. "The clinic's director is sending over the clinic's lawyer to represent both of them," Cynthia informs Bradley.

A loud knock comes at the door. Before anyone can move the door is flung open. One of the finest attorneys in the country, Barbara Walsh, stands in the door fuming mad. The two have been adversaries before. They glare at one another. Barbara speaks first. "You must have lost your mind!" The words are intended to be as venomous as a serpent's bite. Instead of greeting her in kind Bradley smiles and is almost cordial. "... and hello to you too, Barbara. I take it that you are representing the doctor and the mother-to-be," he concludes.

Looking across the room Barbara sees her client, Sharon, for the first time. The expression Sharon wears almost radiates the pain she feels. "Can we step out into the hallway?" Walsh asks of Bradley. "Sure," he replies as he moves toward the door. Before the two lawyers exit the room Walsh turns to her client and speaks, "I'm going to try to end this charade right now, but even if I can't I want you to know that they can't hold you much longer." As Sharon watches the two lawyers exit into the hallway she can't help, but wonder, "Are all of the forces of the universe conspiring against me? Will I ever know a moment of happiness in this life? It seems that one devil after another steals whatever joy might come my way. This attorney, who sets himself up as my judge and jury, is just another in a long line of demons. Doesn't he understand that I don't

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want this abortion, but what else can I do?"

In the hallway Barbara looks Bradley in the eyes sternly. "First of all, where is my other client?" she asks. "Don't get your bra in a bunch. He's in one of the other rooms awaiting his attorney," he tells her. "My clients have nothing to say to you," Barbara assures him. "Now or later," Bradley tells her. "You have no case." She shakes her head in disgust then continues, "If you let my clients go now we won't sue you for false arrest. And I'm being more generous than you deserve at that."

The defense attorney is bewildered when Bradley's reaction is to laugh. The one thing she knows about Bradley Dalton is that he is an excellent attorney. It is hard for her to perceive that he would bring this case against her clients without some strategy for winning it. This time she hopes that she is wrong. What she really hopes is that his wife's death has distorted his judgment.

All Barbara can think to do is to appeal to his compassion. Taking a less adversarial posture she tries to reason with him. "Look Bradley ... I'm truly sorry about your loss, but this is not the answer." Anger wells up in the district attorney. "Don't ever mention my wife to me again! If I were you I would stick to my strength, the law. A psychiatrist you are not. And even if you were I'm not a candidate for your couch," he makes plain his position. Each wonders what the other will do next. Confident that Bradley is not operating with both oars in the water Barbara figures that it is up to her to defuse this situation. It is up to her to force him to do the right thing.

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"You aren't going to interview my clients. As a matter of fact I can almost guarantee that in the next few hours I shall have my clients released from custody. This is probably going to cost you your career. And believe me, I will be sorry if this personal vendetta is your undoing. There are so few lawyers who truly care about justice. It will be a shame to lose you." Walsh is sincere in her praise of Bradley.

The conference is over. The two attorneys step back into the holding room. Bradley tells his staff to give Walsh and Sharon time to confer alone.

The room empties out except for the defense attorney and the mother-to-be. A bitter Barbara sits down with Sharon. Tired of crying, but unable to stop Sharon begs of her attorney, "Why can't they just leave me alone? I did not ask for this. I've done nothing wrong." Trying to put her client at ease Walsh takes Sharon's hand in hers. "No. You haven't ... that said, I would be negligent as your attorney if I didn't give you all of your options. This will probably go away quietly and quickly if you agree to have your child." An agitated Sharon interrupts her. "Don't I have the right to do what I think is best for me and my child?" Walsh nods in agreement. "You do. And if you want I will fight for you and we will win, but the truth is that in the short term this can become very ugly," she advises her client. "I can handle the short term," the mother - to - be answers confidently. "Besides, if I thought that I had a choice we wouldn't be here," she adds. "Then I will make a couple of phone calls and try to rally some support for our side so that we can end this before it becomes a public spectacle," the defense attorney lays out her legal

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strategy.

A short time later Bradley and his staff return with Smith. It is clear that everyone on both sides are on pins and needles. After receiving his instructions Smith takes Sharon to a holding cell to await her hearing. Walsh leaves to see her other client, Dr. Kirk Harrison.

The investigator, Lamp, turns to Bradley and Cynthia. "If you don't need me anymore tonight I'm out of here." The two attorney's shake their heads dismissing him. The door closes behind Lamp leaving Cynthia and Bradley alone for the first time since the arrest.

"The competition that the director came up with isn't shabby." A nervous Cynthia compliments the defense attorney. "Naw. Not shabby at all." Bradley agrees. "She's one of only three attorneys to have ever won a case against you, isn't she?" she reminds him. "One out of the five times she faced me." Bradley reminds his assistant. "... and she won't win this time." he says confidently. The ever cautious Cynthia wonders aloud, "What do you think her strategy will be?" A cynical laugh escapes Bradley. He answers her, "All she has to do is convince a judge or jury that this issue has already been settled by the highest court in the land and she wins. We have to work a strategy." A discouraged Cynthia asks, "What are our chances?" Shaking his head the D.A. answers her, "This isn't Vegas or Atlantic City and we aren't playing a game of chance. I will win because losing means that children will die."

Not wanting to dwell on the improbability of their

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success Cynthia changes the subject, "Did I tell you ... Dave and I broke up?" Now Bradley is puzzled. "I thought he was the one," he admits. "I'm sorry to hear it," he offers his sympathy. "What the hell ... I can do better," Cynthia jokes.

"Am I some callous evil witch out to destroy some virgin princess in order to fill my coffers with gold?" she asks her friend. "Only you can answer that." Bradley offers no support to his friend. "Then at least tell me this ... am I the kind of woman that a man could fall in love with?" she needs to know. Until Janet's death Bradley's life had been so filled with the joy of loving her that it had never even occurred to him to think of other women in those terms, but now that his friend is here asking and he is alone he looks at her differently. "You are a beautiful woman, smart and fun to be with ... a man would have to be a fool not to at least consider falling in love with you," he answers her. Cynthia smiles. They are both quiet. Neither knew where this conversation was supposed to go, so they let it self destruct.

Scurrying through the halls of the police station Walsh seeks a phone when she remembers that she hasn't spoken to Dr. Harrison yet. The calls would have to wait for a few minutes more while she checks on the welfare of her other client. An empathetic Smith escorts Barbara to the cell where the doctor is being held. As soon as Walsh enters the cell area its solitary occupant leaps to his feet. "Are you my attorney? he asks. "Yes I am. Ms. Smart, the clinic's director, hired me to represent you and Ms. Tomlin." For the first time since the arrest Kirk smiles. "When do I get out of here?" he questions, annoyed. "This is totally outrageous! I've never

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even had a parking ticket. Now these outlandish charges," he rages on. "What I need is for you to tell me exactly what occurred at the clinic and about your relationship with Miss Tomlin, personal and professional," she directs him. "Sharon worked for me as a nurse and as my clerical assistant. It was a little over a year ago when she left. She wanted to work around people her own age. From what I gathered she met someone, thought it was serious, but when she became pregnant he ran out on her. I admire her because she didn't let that faze her. The poor girl was determined to have this child. Unfortunately there were problems with the pregnancy." Standing over her client she listens intently as Harrison becomes distressed over his patient's hardships "The baby wasn't getting the nutrients it needed to develop normally. By the time the blockage was detectable the damage was done. If she takes this pregnancy to term the baby will more than likely be born severely retarded. I told her this and she decided to have an abortion."

In her mind Walsh is already evaluating her client's strengths and weaknesses. She can see some judge or jury viewing Sharon as a loose woman who tried to trick a man into getting married. They may feel that she got her just deserts when she was abandoned and now that the man is gone she no longer wants to have the child. These things could work against her. The law is clear, in Walsh's mind, Sharon has every right to have this abortion, but Barbara knows that a court of law is about more than the letter of the law. Knowing her adversary, Bradley Dalton, she knows he will do what he has to do to win.

The sullen client recounts the remainder of his tale. "I was about to do the procedure when the door

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burst open and the director of the clinic, Miss Smart, enters with the others. Outraged I demanded to know what was going on. Instead of an explanation I was handcuffed and placed under arrest. The worst of it was that I had to stand by helpless while they put that poor young woman through the same humiliation."

Noting that there seems more than a patient/doctor and more than an ex-employee/employer relationship between her clients Walsh questions the doctor further. "Did you and Sharon have a personal relationship?" Annoyed by the implications of the question Harrison answers snappishly, "She is like a daughter to me!" Being a little more direct this time Walsh asks again, "That is not what I meant. Were you and Sharon ever intimate?" The veins on Harrison's head were throbbing so much from the anger he felt as though they would surely burst. Angrily he replies, "God woman, don't you people have any decency about you? Of course not! She's young enough to be my granddaughter." Barbara sighs, relieved. "This is a question the D.A. will surely ask and I can't afford to be surprised by the answer," she tells her client. Dr. Harrison hangs his head in resignation. "I don't know if I can do this," his spirit defeated. "Make no mistake, if this goes to trial you won't have a choice in the matter. If you make a questionable impression upon the court you may buy yourself a prison sentence," she warns him.

Having set the worst scenario Walsh now tries to lift his spirits by giving him a more realistic view of their case. "More than likely this will never go to trial. Even if it should go that far the prosecution will be fighting an uphill battle in

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their attempt to overturn a Supreme Court decision. Unless they can exploit some skeletons in your closet they have no chance of winning a judge or jury over. Tell me that you don't have any skeletons in your closet, do you Dr. Harrison?" He shakes his head no. "Not only don't I have any skeletons I don't even have a bone," he answers confidently.

Walsh stands staring down at her client. She hopes that this client is telling her the truth. From past experience she knows that clients will lie and other times they have some little thing that a skilled attorney like Bradley Dalton can twist and distort into something scandalous.

As she turns to leave she takes one last look at the fatherly figure of a man, who sits there totally devastated by the events of the day. She is more confident, now that she has talked with him. The attorney believes that he can hold up under the pressure and that will belay some of the negative imagery of her unwed mother-client, if this should somehow go to trial.

After leaving Dr. Harrison she begins to implement her plan to cut Bradley off at the pass. Before any hearing she will play her trump card. An hour and a half of bouncing in her car on the somewhat rugged roads of a rural Howard County suburb is what she has to endure. She finds herself outside of the personal home of the governor of Maryland. The abortion issue is a political hot potato and she is confident that the governor doesn't want to play with this hot potato during an election year. This is her ace. The governor will surely step in on her behalf to persuade Bradley to drop the case against her clients.

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The determined attorney exits her car and proceeds up to the door of the governor's home. After knocking she stands there nervously waiting. A uniformed state trooper answers the door. The officer looks at Walsh curiously. "Can I help you?" he asks. "Yes. Tell the governor Barbara Walsh is here to see him." The officer is not so easily persuaded. "At this hour? Do you have an appointment?" he continues to cross - exam the woman. "No. I don't, but I am a personal friend- Barbara Walsh- and I have a very important message for him. He will see me, even at this hour," she assures him. The state trooper ushers her into the main hallway where another officer waits. Officer Denton will wait here with you while I go see if the governor is willing to see you," he instructs Walsh then walks away.

A short time later the trooper returns with the governor's wife, Shirley, by his side. Warmly Shirley greets Barbara. "Barbara! How are you doing? What brings you out here to our neck of the woods?" The two troopers are satisfied that Walsh is who she says she is, so they walk away leaving the women alone. "It's very important that I talk with Henry. It concerns one of my cases and his political career." The governor's wife stares at her friend puzzled and disturbed.

Approximately two hours later Walsh, Shirley and the governor stand on the porch of his home saying their good - byes. "By the time that you get back to the police station State's Attorney Cummings will be there waiting for you. I can't promise you anything, but I will use my influence to bring about a speedy and fair resolution of this situation," the political jargon masks his non - committal posture.

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The lawyer makes her way to her car then drives away.

It is just as the governor had promised, William Cummings, now State Attorney General, is at the station waiting when she arrives. The greeting from Cummings is a forced politeness. After all few politicians or anyone else for that matter, find delight in someone doing an end around them to their boss.

"Good morning Ms. Walsh." Her patience is wearing thin so the defense attorney roars at Cummings. "I don't know how good it is, but maybe your voice of reason can make it so." Being the ever cautious politician the state's attorney is not going to make promises that he cannot keep. "Before I say anything why don't we meet with Mr. Dalton, so I can find out what his position is on this matter." Each word carefully selected while each sentence is equally as carefully sculpted.

At this point one could almost see steam coming from the top of Walsh's head. "What is there to hear? Obviously the man's grief has affected his judgment and he is traversing a perilous ravine for himself, you and the governor. The Supreme Court has already decided this issue," she warns. No one uses a smile as an evasive weapon better than William. He smiles his very disarming smile then speaks with much reserve to the defense attorney. "I'm not the judge Ms. Walsh. You aren't arguing your case before me. The governor asked me to come down and hear what Mr. Dalton has to say and then advise him on this matter. It will still be his call rather or not to pursue this case further." Barbara figures that his speech is just rhetoric to protect him and the

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governor. She believes that he must act to stop Bradley. Anything else would be political suicide. A smile of confidence creases her lips.

All of the lawyers in this drama are assembled in the first interrogation room. An annoyed state's attorney begins by reprimanding both Walsh and Bradley. This is another of Cummings strategic tricks, getting the opposition back on their heels then sell them on his position. "Ms. Walsh ... Mr. Dalton ... needless to say I didn't care much for the governor calling me at 3:00 am in the morning about a local legal matter, but he didn't like the idea of a possible multi - million dollar class action lawsuit on behalf of would-be-mothers, so here I am. I hope that we can resolve this matter among ourselves."

It is becoming harder and harder for Barbara not to surrender to the idea of her having to fight this in court. She decides to issue her ultimatum then act according to Cummings response. "All my clients want is for these totally ridiculous charges to be dropped and to be left alone to exercise their rights of free choice."

Cummings is too savvy an attorney to admit to anything. Instead he goes on the offensive, "I don't think my esteemed colleague would have brought these charges unless he felt that in this particular case your clients aren't privy to such rights, but let's not get adversarial here until I've had a chance to talk with him."

It has been a long day for all concerned. Nerves are frazzled and patience is a commodity in short supply. Barbara blows up at William. "Bull! You and

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I know what's going on here. You go and do what you have to do, but know this, if you don't satisfy me lawsuits will result from this litigation." Cummings turns to the silent Bradley and takes his arm, leading him from the room.

The two men search the halls of the station for an empty room in which to talk in private. Finally they find one. They enter and shut the door behind themselves. Bradley had been Cummings protegee, so the man takes a great deal of interest in his career. Besides his interest as a mentor he is concerned because this case is a political powder keg. No matter what side you are perceived to be on the other side could easily use it to sway enough of your constituency to derail your political aspirations.

Like a father scolding his son Cummings lights into Bradley. "You've stepped into it this time and that would be fine if you don't care about your career anymore, except you have me and the governor in the deep shit with you. We don't like being in this position. Why are you pursuing this? Do you really think that your case is strong enough to get a judge to overturn a Supreme Court decision? The only thing that you are likely to accomplish is to send your promising career down the crapper." A stoic Bradley answers his former boss. "First of all I don't care about you or the governor getting your feet shitty. Secondly, in this jurisdiction I decide rather or not I have a case. Thirdly, but far from least, I know a little bit about the law myself. I have the highest conviction rate of any prosecutor in the country, including you, so if I think that I have a good chance of winning you had better not bet the farm against me."

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The two men are interrupted by a knock at the door. The D.A. shouts at Smith, who is on the other side of that door, "Come in!" Smith enters cautiously. "The governor is on the phone for you Mr. Dalton. Line two." Hastily Smith makes his exit. Bradley makes his way to the phone and picks it up. The State Attorney General glares at him with a paternal disapproval. "Hello your honor." Bradley listens as the governor speaks. When the governor has finished his spiel Bradley is abrupt in his response. "Sir I respect both you and Mr. Cummings, but as I just told the attorney general I was elected by the citizens of this city and by their authority alone I decide which cases will be prosecuted in this jurisdiction." Again Bradley listens as the governor issues veiled threats. The governor predicts that this will end badly for Bradley and that there will be nothing that he will be able to do to help him. "I understand sir ... it will be my balls in a sling ... good-bye."

Bradley hangs up the phone then turns his attention back to Cummings. "Is our business over?" he asks. "Yours just might be Bradley. Yours just might be." He turns and leaves Bradley standing there alone in the vacant office. Bradley, Walsh, the governor and Cummings; the lawyers, had all fired their first volleys, but this war was far from over.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 29
A SUMMARY CHALLENGE

The mood is somber in the courtroom as the attorneys, their clients and other interested parties enter the hearing room. The soul chilling image of baby Samantha being lowered into the ground in her coffin haunts the Baltimore City D.A. as he sits staring across the courtroom at the would-be-mother. The ambitious assistant D.A. bites her bottom lip in anticipation of the landmark case to come. It holds her career trajectory in the balance and could end before it begins here tonight.

Uncharacteristic of Dr. Harrison he sits hands clinched like some frightened little boy. His reputation, his career, his very freedom could all be lost as a result of what he believes to be a frivolous act of litigation. Walsh is the picture of the angry combatant. Her nostrils flair with righteous indignation. The learned attorney wonders how this had gone so far and worries how much further it may go. Anna, Walsh's assistant, a newcomer to the courtroom battlefield, simply looks anxious and is confused. The mother-to-be heart is doing flip-flops. The melancholy which surrounds Sharon is only disturbed by the reviewing of her life. This isn't some idle machination. She believes that she may be able to find that grievous wrong she has done to merit this bombardment of misery she has endured in her short lifetime. Maybe if she repents of it she will be forgiven. What had merited the cruel treatment by her mother, losing a grandfather when she needed him most, falling for a villain such as Michael, finding that her unborn child would never enjoy or maybe even know the gift of life and then to have people who don't even know her try to take all that she has left away from her? Sharon

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could think of nothing. There was a good reason she couldn't think of anything. She had done no wrong. This was a good person, but the one terrible truth about life is that often bad things happen to good people.

At the end of the prosecution table Bradley and Cynthia are huddled. "Who did we draw?" Bradley asks. "Judge Barkham," Cynthia answers. "By the book Barkham," Bradley comments. "Is that good or bad?" Cynthia wonders aloud. "Barkham gives us a better chance than with most judges. He will look at the merits of the case as it relates to the Roe vs Wade decision and not just look at the decision itself in a vacuum. We may yet get to trial," Bradley answers. Cynthia sighs a sigh of relief.

Anna stares across the room at Cynthia and Bradley. Turning to Barbara she asks, "What could he be thinking to bring these charges? Surely the judge will take one look at the charges, reprimand him and dismiss this case?" the novice speculates. "Don't be so sure of that. Dalton's grief may be his motivation, but you had better believe that he has a reason for believing that this will go to trial and we had better be prepared to do so," she warns her young assistant.

The defendants, Sharon and Dr. Harrison sit side by side at the other end of the defense table. This is the first time since their arrest that the two friends have been close enough to speak to one another. "How are you holding up?" a concerned Kirk asks his friend. "Not well at all," Sharon admits. "How did it come to this?" the befuddled young woman wants to know. Her equally perplexed friend has no answers for her. "I had hoped that all of the legal

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maneuvering was over and that women could have an abortion in a safe environment, instead of some seedy, dangerous back room, but I guess the lawyers aren't ready to let go of this yet," the frustrated doctor replies. A frightened Sharon asks her friend, "What is going to happen to us?" He is unsure himself. All he can do is shrug his shoulders. "I don't know. Our lawyer keeps saying that they have no case, but when I look at her I see someone who is preparing for battle. Honestly I think she has no idea what the D.A. has planned and that makes me nervous," Harrison admits.

The courtroom is nearly empty at this time of night. There is a single sheriff standing next to the judge's bench. The bailiff stands on the other side of the courtroom from the sheriff. A few spectators are sprinkled around the courtroom. Other lawyers and their clients round out this assembly. The door to the judges chamber opens and the intimidating figure of Judge Barkham enters the courtroom. The bailiff's voice booms out over the nearly empty courtroom. "All rise. The honorable Judge Anthony Barkham presiding. This session of the Superior Court of the State of Maryland is now convened." Barkham makes his way to the bench and sits down. The people in the court still stand, like statues in the park. "You may be seated," the bailiff instructs the court. The sound of chairs scraping across the marble floors echoes throughout as everyone sits down. The court stenographer hands the bailiff the files for the court docket and he hands it to the judge. Again the bailiff's voice resonates throughout the courtroom. "The first case on the docket is the State vs Sharon Tomlin and Dr. Kirk Harrison. The charges are as follows; attempted murder and conspiracy to commit murder."

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The evening sessions are usually very boring and very cut and dry, so judge Barkham is surprised that the attorneys are entering pleadings. "I understand that there are some pleadings by the defense in this matter," he states matter of fact like. Quickly jumping into action Walsh stands and addresses the court. "Yes your honor. We respectfully submit that this case be summarily dismissed. My client is in her first trimester and therefore in accordance with the Roe vs Wade decision of the Supreme Court there could have been no crime committed in planning of or in the attempting to abort the fetus in question." The cracked and stern face of Barkham is creased with befuddlement. "Are you aware that the defendant is in her first trimester Mr. Dalton?" a steel edged voice asks of the district attorney. "Yes I am your honor." Bradley answers succinctly. Now Barkham is more bewildered than before. "I would truly be interested in hearing your rationale behind filling the court's docket with a case which appears to have absolutely no merit," the superior court judge inquires of the esteemed attorney. Confidently Bradley stands and approaches the bench. "Your honor appearances can be deceiving." Bradley hands papers to the Judge then turns around and hands copies of the same documents to Walsh. He continues, "The Supreme Court ruled in favor of first trimester abortions in their Roe vs Wade decision, but they also rendered a decision in the Brown vs the Board of Education in which they declare that they frown on "Irrebuttable Presumptions" as they apply to the defining of person under the 14th amendment. Yet in their decision in Roe vs Wade despite stating in their opinions that there are other reasonable definitions for person as the term "person" pertains to the unborn child, they created an "Irrebuttable Presumption" when they established

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the first trimester as the singular definition for person for the group—the unborn child."

A tired Barkham shakes his head. "And I thought that today was going to be another boring court calendar." The judge turns to the bailiff and addresses him, "Be careful what you wish for Jimmy. You just might get it." Jimmy laughs and answers the judge. "Yes sir." Turning his attention back to Bradley, Barkham tells the D.A. and the rest of the court his intentions. "Court will be adjourned for one hour while I examine the pleadings and position papers," Barkham stands up and leaves out.

As the door to the judges chamber closes behind him Smith and McDonald walk the prisoners back to the holding area. Cynthia and Bradley head for the coffee shop across the street from the courthouse. Silently they sit sipping their coffee. Cynthia bites into a cheese Danish. "Hungry are you?" Bradley teases. Looking guilty Cynthia excuses her appetite. "I haven't eaten anything since yesterday. I was just about to eat a sandwich when the mother-to-be showed up." Reaching across the table Bradley brushes a crumb from Cynthia's cheek. "Uh hmm." Lamp mutters as he returns unexpectedly. The two friends look awkwardly at one another. Their attention goes back to the case. "How long do you think it will take Barkham to make a decision?" Cynthia asks. "It doesn't do any good to sit here guessing. He will make his decision after he's had a chance to review the materials," the seemingly cool and calm Bradley responds. Cynthia insists on speculating. "If he takes his time then he's probably leaning toward our interpretation, but if he comes back quickly with a decision he's probably depending on *Roe vs Wade*," Bradley ignores his colleague and continues to relax

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and enjoy his coffee.

Meanwhile outside the holding area the two arresting officers stand guard over the prisoners. In the holding room Barbara and Anna sit across from Sharon and Dr. Harrison. With her head bowed low Sharon is the picture of surrender. "Don't get discouraged." Walsh instructs her. "After the judge reviews the papers the two of you should be on your way home." Barbara tries to sound confident. Sharon is losing her faith in this woman. "What does all of this mean? You told us before that we would be going home five minutes after you requested the dismissal. I don't see any doors swinging shut behind us," Sharon adds sarcastically.

A sheriff enters the coffee shop and walks over to the D.A. and his staff. "Court is about to reconvene," he tells them. They thank him, pay their bill then follow the sheriff back across the street to the courthouse. To their surprise Barkham has returned early and is already seated on the bench. There is a murmuring whisper that flows through the courtroom as the parties to this case return late. "Order in the court!" the judge demands. He knocks his gavel several times and a hush falls over the courtroom. In a quiet whisper Walsh speaks to Sharon and Harrison. "This may be over within a few moments, but if not it is very important that the two of you remain composed." She prepares them for the worst. Sharon is becoming hysterical. "Why is this happening?" Sharon screams. An intolerant Barkham is quick to take back control of his court. "Ms. Walsh, if you can't control your client I will." Quickly Walsh turns her attention to Sharon. Taking her client's face in between the palms of her hands she stares reassuringly into her client's eyes

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"We can get through this if you simply trust that it will work out." A wave of resolve washes over Sharon and she settles down. Her attorney turns to Barkham and says, "Everything is fine, your honor. Everything is fine."

The assistant D.A. looks across the room at the frazzled young woman. For the first time since this all began she feels pangs of guilt. "The poor thing is hysterical," she notes. An unsympathetic Bradley turns to Cynthia. "Maybe you would like to go over there and let her cry on your shoulder?" he asks. Looking at her friend with disdain Cynthia answers his cynicism. "It's almost funny when good people act like bastards." He ignores her jab at him.

Again Walsh leans over to her client and offers some words of advise. "Be strong. You are not helping yourself by pissing off the judge." Calling upon an inner strength that she didn't even realize that she possessed Sharon takes control of her emotions. First she stops crying then sits up tall and defiant. With her newfound strength she turns and glares at Bradley with contempt. The cool and cynical Bradley turns to Cynthia and says, "Walsh seems to have put a little starch into your weeping willow."

There is no denying Barkham is impressed with Bradley's work. "Mr. Dalton you have given this court an intriguing morsel to chew on. It's my opinion that no matter what happens here this issue will be reviewed by an appeals court and any victory you realize will probably be overturned." Barkham pauses, Walsh smiles and Bradley frowns. "... but I also find that you have presented this court with sufficient legal cause of action to proceed in this

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matter. Therefore I am holding the defendants over for trial," he declares. An outraged Walsh jumps up from her seat and screams, "Your honor hear me ..."! An impatient Barkham orders Walsh, "Sit down, Miss Walsh! The issue of a trial has been decided. The only thing left to decide is the matters of bail and a trial date." Now it's Bradley who stands up and interrupts Judge Barkham. "Excuse me your honor, but there is one other matter for the court to consider." Barkham can't believe that after the concession he has made to Bradley that he is asking for more. "Don't press your luck Mr. Dalton," he instructs the learned attorney. Unbending in his resolve Bradley continues on. "The main issue of this case is the protection of the rights of the unborn child. To achieve this I asks for an injunction to prevent Dr. Harrison from performing any abortions and to prevent Ms. Tomlin from seeking one. At least until this matter has been resolved by this court." A livid Walsh can't believe this. "I object!" Waving Barbara down into her seat Barkham makes it evident the direction in which this trial is headed. "If I have deemed that Mr. Dalton has sufficient cause of action to proceed to trial then I must find that there is cause to protect the unborn child until such time as the issue of "person" has been decided."

Defeated for the moment Barbara sits down in her seat. Sharon turns to Walsh confused. She hasn't understood a single word of this legal mumbo-jumbo the lawyers have been spewing out. "What does this all mean?" she asks her attorney. Hesitantly Walsh discloses to Sharon the affect of the judge's rulings. "You won't be allowed to go through with your abortion for now nor later if we lose." Again Sharon jumps up yelling. This time her tirade is

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directed at the judge. "You are all crazy! No one can make me have this child!" Though empathetic to the woman's plight Judge Barkham is quickly losing his patience with the obstinate defendant. "The next outburst and I will find your client in contempt, Ms. Walsh," he threatens. Taking Sharon's arm Walsh pulls her back down into her seat. There won't be anymore hysterics your honor." The attorney promises. She leans in and speaks softly to Sharon. "You are not helping yourself with these theatrics. Believe me," Barbara warns. The would-be-mother sits quietly. With authority Barkham barks out his decision. "I grant the people the injunction." He then pauses for a moment. "Now can we address the issue of bail?" Standing up once more Walsh sighs then makes her plea to the court. "Both of my clients are law abiding citizens with roots in the community and pose no threat to the public interest. I am asking that they be released on their own recognizance."

Reluctantly Bradley protests. "Ordinarily I would agree with Ms. Walsh, but Ms. Tomlin has expressed here tonight again and again that she is in a very emotional state and that she believes that she and not this court is the final arbitrator of her unborn child's fate. I regretfully request that she be denied bail."

It is hard for Barbara to phantom that Bradley could make such a cruel and harsh request. Bounding to her feet she yells out her declaration of utter disbelief. "Mr. Dalton has either chosen a joke in poor taste or he has lost his mind. There is not one thing in Ms. Tomlin's history which would suggest that she would intentionally defy this court's order." As Walsh had prognosticated throughout the

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evening Sharon's actions are about to come back and bite her. "I'm sorry Ms. Tomlin ... Ms. Walsh, but I have to agree with Mr. Dalton's assessment of your client's actions here today. Dr. Harrison shall be released on his own recognizance while Ms. Tomlin shall be held over for trial," Barkham orders. A defeated Barbara places her head down into her hands.

"Because of the circumstances of this case I am going to fast track these proceedings," Barkham begins. Bradley interrupts again. Forever seeking an edge Bradley request more time to prepare his case. This angers Barkham and he unleashes his fury upon the district attorney. "Mr. Dalton, do you take this court to be a fool? Never mind. You need not answer that. It's obvious that you do. Your opinion of the court's intelligence aside, your request is denied. Undoubtedly you and your team began preparing for this case before you even thought to bring these charges." The judge turns to the defense team. "I take it that you don't share Mr. Dalton's desire for more time." With disdain Walsh laughs. "No disrespect to this court intended, but you can't be serious, your honor. Time is a luxury one of my clients does not have. Since given no choice we are prepared to proceed as quickly as possible," she acidly replies. "The court shall do everything within its power to protect the rights of everyone involved in this case. If I should find that your client has a right under the law to choose she shall be given every chance to exercise that right," Barkham assures Barbara.

Demonstrating a dictatorial presence Barkham turns to the sheriff and commands of him that he take Sharon into custody. The judge then informs those

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remaining occupants of the courtroom that the remainder of the docket will proceed after a short recess.

Word had gotten out to the press during the first recess so now there is a clamoring as they rush from the courtroom to file their stories in time for their deadlines. The sheriff aids Sharon up from her seat. The would-be-mother looks at her lawyer with disdain. "You said that this was going to be so simple. Instead I'm going to jail because I don't want my child to suffer." Sharon makes plain her grievance with her lawyer. "You made this harder than it had to be, but believe me when I tell you everything will be alright in the end." The sheriff puts handcuffs on Sharon. Feeling already defeated Sharon can only laugh in response to her attorney's words. "Yeah. After all you've been so very right, so far." The reticent officer leads Sharon away.

Across the courtroom Cynthia is beaming with delight over the course of events thus far. A cautious Bradley turns and warns her. "Don't start patting yourself on the back yet. All we've done is cleared the first hurdle."

An exasperated Walsh walks over to Bradley and stares at him pitifully. "I feel sorry for you for a number of reasons, but most of all because I know that deep down inside you are an honorable man so when you realize what you have done to this poor innocent woman you are going to regret it more than you can possibly know right now," having said that Walsh turns and starts to walk away. Her arm is grabbed and held by Bradley. Assassin's daggers shoot from her eyes as she first glares directly into his eyes and then at his hand around her wrist.

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He lets go of her wrist then says his piece. "The only innocent in this courtroom today is her unborn child. And the only regret I will have is if I am not a good enough lawyer to save this child's life."

As Walsh walks away it is clear that the lines have been drawn and that a war has began. There will be no summary judgment.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 30
THE POWERS THAT BE

It is only the second hour of a new work day, but neither the governor nor the state's attorney are mindful of the restful night's sleep that they have missed out on. In the center of the spacious study of the governor's home the two men plot a solution to the mess that they perceive Bradley is creating for them. The stifling silence is shattered by the governor's angry dialogue, "If only that damned Barkham had dismissed the case! Why didn't he?! Cummings can't help but admire Bradley's skill as an attorney. "It is a well conceived strategy. "Irrebuttable Presumption," does create a cause of action and that is all that a judge is supposed to consider when deciding if to send a case to trial. Most judges would bail on their judicial responsibility and not challenge a Supreme Court decision. Our misfortune is that we ran into a principled judge who understands the law," Cummings explains.

"So what do we do now?" the governor wants to know. They are interrupted by the governor's wife, Shirley. "Can I get you gentlemen something?" she asks, always the consummate hostess. Cummings declines. Henry asks for a brandy. The two men watch as Shirley takes the brandy and snifter down from the bar and pours her husband his drink then as quickly as she had appeared she is gone. "Why hasn't this Irree ... whatever come up before now and in someone else's jurisdiction?" the governor complains more than questions. "There aren't very many if any other litigators around with Dalton' skills, sir." Cummings explains.

The governor paces the room like a caged lion. "The

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election committees aren't going to like having this matter brought up during an election year. We all thought that this had been defused. Roe vs Wade, a reasonable compromise, isn't it?" Henry asks. "I don't ask myself those kinds of questions," Cummings admits. "What's on the books I interpret then try not to step on my constituency's toes." William admits, always the consummate lawyer/politician."I want to do the right thing, but I don't want it blowing up in my face." Henry waivers back and forth. "The right thing?" the state's attorney laughs. "What the hell is that? If you ask a hundred people, fifty will say one thing and the other fifty will argue with moral certainty that the first fifty are wrong. The truth is that for a politician the right thing is what the majority of the voters find prudent for their lives at any given point in time -in history." The cynical Cummings answers. "... but killing babies ...?" the governor questions. "Some say they aren't babies." Henry shakes his head. "Does anyone really believe that or is it a rationale to excuse the most heinous of crimes?" he wonders aloud. "Again that's not a question a politician can afford to ask himself," the pragmatic Cummings advises.

"Either way we're not here to debate the correctness of abortion. We're here to figure out how to protect our political asses from the folly of a crusader. The compromise has been made and accepted. Now he threatens to upset the status quo. This could push us back into a battle over personal liberties vs the right to life. A battle that political animals like us can ill-afford," he reminds the governor.

Henry takes a sip of his brandy then leans back and he sighs. "It's the little pleasures like this which

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transports me away from the muck and mire of the political games." Slowly savoring this momentary pleasure the governor takes another sip from his brandy. "Too bad that after the brandy is gone and the moment's pleasure has passed one still has hard choices to make. What are we to do?" Henry rambles on. A smile creases the state's attorney's lips as he has an inspiration. "There's one person who may be able to reason with Dalton," Cummings recalls. "And whom might that be?" Henry asks. "Judge Caroline Beecham. She was his mentor," William informs the governor. "Then get her over here! Right now!" Henry orders.

At 4:00 am it is still dark, chilly and foreboding as Caroline parks in front of the governor's home. Tired she drags herself from the car and up to the mansion door. Shirley answers the door because she's expecting her friend. Caroline is amazed that the woman appears as fresh as a newborn babe and as elegant as a debutante, even at this ungodly hour. Caroline laughs. "How in the world can you look so beautiful at this wretched time of day?" she gives her hostess a compliment. "Years of practice my dear. Years of practice," Shirley jokingly assures her friend. The governor's wife then leads the judge through the house and into the study, where the governor and the state's attorney await her.

Waving her hand with a comedic flair Caroline announces herself, "Ta da! I have arrived!" The two men look at her with weary drooped expressions and are far from amused. A semi - cordial Henry greets Caroline. "Judge Beecham. Thank you for coming out at this early hour." When the governor refers to you by your title it should set off warning bells, Caroline thinks to herself. She also wonders what

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dirty task this duo had in mind for her to do. The direct woman cuts to the chase, "What can I do for you gentlemen?" The governor decides to be candid with the judge. "Your relationship with Bradley Dalton may be of a great benefit to us all, including Mr. Dalton. Your friend has chosen a path which could prove perilous to all of those who are aligned with him. We don't want to side against him, but unless we can find a way to meet somewhere in the middle we may be left with no choice. It was our hope that you may be able to mediate this middle ground position for us."

The only thing that surprises Caroline about this ambush is Cummings. The state's attorney knows Bradley and he surely knows that the DA will not compromise. "I'm intrigued. Beneath the veiled threats you've failed to tell me exactly what it is you hope that I can talk Mr. Dalton into doing or not doing." William tries his defensive tactics on the judge. "Threats is a harsh choice of words." Henry interrupts. "Let's not get lost in semantics. The truth is we hope that you can reason with him. Convince him that he won't overturn Roe vs Wade. Make it clear that there is little to gain and a lot to lose by reviving this issue." Caroline laughs. Henry glares at her. "I don't see anything amusing about this situation Judge Beecham," the governor reprimands her. "Of course you wouldn't. The amusing thing gentlemen is that you assumed that because I am a woman that I would be pro - choice. Your assumption gentlemen is incorrect. Will I try to dissuade Mr. Dalton? Hell no! I applaud his effort and wish him well," she states resolutely.

The two men stand in stone faced astonishment. Then an angry Cummings assures Caroline that they will

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bring Bradley down hard. Again the judge laughs. "He's a big boy. I'm confident that he can handle himself with the likes of you or I would never have introduced you to him." Turning Caroline heads for the door. When she reaches the door to the study she turns to face Henry and William. "Good night gentlemen. Let's try not to meet under these circumstances ever again," then she turns and exits the room.

The two co-conspirators look at one another with expressions of defeat. "Great idea you had there," Henry's words are laced with sarcasm. "We tried to be nice. Now let's bring in the big guns," Cummings suggests a shadowy accomplice. "And who might that be?" the confused governor asks. "The media," William answers. "We'll be dancing on an icy slope. One misstep and it will be us that fall instead of Mr. Dalton," the governor warns. "Then we mustn't take that wrong step," the state's attorney instructs Henry.

The morning has slipped away and they are deep into the day as the two men wage their secret media war. Reporters from all the major local papers and television stations stand around the study of the governor's home. The governor stands behind a podium at the head of the gathering. At his side is the state's attorney general, Cummings.

After last night's court decision to proceed with the trial which will challenge Roe vs Wade there are rumblings and whispers coming from the press corps gathered. "I thank you ladies and gentlemen of the press," the governor begins. "For those of you who are not aware of the present situation that our state finds itself in let me explain. One of our

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local district attorneys has decided to challenge Roe vs Wade. Mr. Cummings, our state's attorney general, has advised me that he concurs with the decision of the highest court of the land."

A reporter from the Sun paper asks, "Does that mean that you are taking a pro-choice position, governor?" Henry knows that he doesn't want to be seen as changing his position so he changes the inference. "This isn't about my personal position on abortion. This is about how our system of government works. The court system is the final arbitrator of the law and in this instance that decision has been made." A second reporter jumps in, "If that's true won't the courts simply kick this case out?" A third reporter interjects, "Hasn't a judge already heard and sent this matter to trial?" It is becoming a feeding frenzy. Questions fly from everywhere. "Is this a face saving strategy? Is the governor bailing on the city's district attorney? Is this all a political ploy?" and many more questions inundate the governor. This is quickly backfiring on Henry and Cummings.

The Sun reporter, Sutton, sits in his car anticipating all of the in fighting, the courtroom fireworks and human drama about to unfold and he is foaming at the mouth. He calls his editor on his cell phone. "Roe vs Wade" isn't the only thing under attack. The golden boy, Bradley Dalton, that everyone was speaking of for a senate seat before the death of his wife is under siege." he laughs. "That's right ... the governor and the attorney general." Sutton listens as his editor asks for more details. "The headline should read - Irrebuttable Presumption" Again he listens. "Some legal bull crap the golden boy came up with to challenge "Roe vs

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Wade." Silently the reporter waits. "This story has everything, political in fighting between the establishment and the new guard, the D.A.s wife and kid died just a few months ago. We can make him out to be David against three Goliaths, the political machinery, the Supreme Court, and the woman's movement. This will get those couch potatoes to read their newspapers and watch the news for a few weeks," he half kids. "Someone should have told the golden boy that taking on the powers that be is like trying to pull a lion's tooth, even if you succeed you aren't likely to survive unscathed and the lion ain't likely to thank you."

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 31
PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Jimmy Winston, the court bailiff, is just an ordinary Joe, but he finds himself in the middle of an historical event. Despite this the lawn needs mowing, so that's where he is the morning the story of the trial breaks. The man trudges behind his lawn mower, up and down his well manicured lawn. The bailiff is relieved to see his wife, Mary, heading toward him carrying a tray with two glasses of iced lemonade and her homemade brownies on it. Smiling he turns off the lawn mower. He accompanies her to the patio where Mary sits the tray down upon the patio table. The amorous Jimmy takes his wife in his arms. Kissing her he also twirls her around in the air playfully. Wiggling free of his grasp she giggles like a school girl. "Silly. What would the neighbors say if they saw us acting like a couple of teenagers?" the publicly prudish Mary scolds him. "They would say ... Damn they are lucky!" he surprises her with his response. His answer brings out the mischievous streak in Mary. First she looks around to see if any of their neighbors are spying on them. Once she is satisfied that the coast is clear she grabs a hold of Jimmy's butt with both hands and pulls him close. "Don't sell no wolf tickets that your tired old body can't back up," Mary chides her husband.

They are startled apart when their neighbor, Wally, calls out to them teasing. "You two take that stuff in the house. This is a decent neighborhood." They laugh and Jimmy calls back to his neighbor and friend. "Don't be a player hater just because your wife has you on rations my friend." An embarrassed Mary releases her husband's butt and runs for the house, blushing all of the way. Laughing it is Jimmy

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who scolds Wally. "Now see what you did. You chased her into the house." Wally makes his way across his and Jimmy's lawns until he stands beside Jimmy on his patio. He reaches down and picks up one of the lemonades and a brownie. "That was what I intended to do. After all I saw that she had only brought out two glasses of lemonade. One for you and the other one would have been for her if I hadn't gotten rid of her," he jokes. "Wally you are just no good," he accuses his friend. They enjoy the refreshments Mary has prepared. As they sit sipping on the lemonade and eating the brownies Wally recalls something from the morning news. "Hey. Don't you work for that Judge Barkham?" he asks. "I sure do," Jimmy replies. "What made you think of him?" Jimmy asks his friend. "Haven't you been watching the news this morning?" Wally asks. "I hear enough bad stuff on my job. I refuse to come home and be deluged by more of it," he replies. An agitated Wally urges Jimmy to go into the house and check out the news right now. He warns his friend that his life is about to be flipped topsy-turvy.

A curious Jimmy rushes into the house leaving his friend on the patio eating the brownies and drinking the last of the lemonade. A now frisky Mary lays across the couch watching a romantic movie when she spots her husband. Sitting up she blows him a kiss. "You wanna start something fella," she asks naughtily. Jimmy ignores her, picks up the remote and changes the channel. It is bad enough that he has ignored her sexy voice in favor of the TV, but then to turn off her show is too much. To her surprise Jimmy is watching the news. "Since when do you watch the news?" she quizzes her husband. Sitting down next to his wife he explains, "It's about the trial coming up in my court." The local

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news anchor is detailing the perceived highlights of the upcoming trial, "Baltimore City District Attorney Bradley Dalton yesterday in Superior Court brought charges against a would - be -mother and a local doctor of conspiracy to commit murder and attempted murder. The surprising thing about this case is that they were attempting an abortion procedure which should be considered legal under Roe vs Wade. Some say that the D.A. is just another male challenging a woman's right of choice. Others say he is a moral crusader for the rights of children. Judge Barkham, the presiding judge in this case and a much respected Superior court judge, has placed this case on the court's docket, so at least one court feels the D.A.'s case has some legal merit."

Clicking the remote Jimmy turns off the TV and settles back on the couch. "It's going to be a three ring circus around the courthouse." He acknowledges. "... and that poor woman ... she doesn't know what she's going to have to endure." Mary is unsympathetic. "Poor woman my butt. She is intending to end her pregnancy ... to kill her baby," she accuses. "You have no idea what is going on in this woman's life. One doesn't just wake up one day and say, hey I think it would be a good idea to have an abortion today. She's probably going through her own private hell and now she'll have to go through a very public one as well," Jimmy forecasts.

Like many, Mary and Jimmy have strongly opposing views on this subject and are not going to be dissuaded by anything someone else might say, not even their life partners.

Meanwhile across town Lamp and Cynthia have admitted to one another that they had handled things badly

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after that one night. Cynthia had wanted to pretend that nothing important had happened between them and so he retaliated by making it public. They decide it is best to go back to being adversarial friends. The two friends stop in a nearby cop bar, Turners. As they walk in the door Cynthia spots McDonald and Smith sitting at the bar. The angry assistant D.A. stomps over to where the two policemen sit and stops in front of McDonald. Expecting trouble Lamp is a step behind her.

The policeman, McDonald looks up and grins. "Where's my damn money?" she demands. He laughs, but goes into his pocket and takes out the few dollars then hands them to her. "I'm sorry," he apologizes. "... but you really know how to push a guy's buttons," he explains. "I hope so," Cynthia half kids. The four of them laugh. Lamp and Cynthia sit down joining Smith and McDonald at the bar. They are having drinks and sharing idle conversation. It is inevitable that the topic would turn to the trial. The assistant D.A. is delighted with herself and Bradley and she wants to gloat. "There are probably only a half of a dozen D.A. offices in the country that could have gotten this case to trial," she brags. Glaring at the egotistical attorney Smith then chimes in. "What's going to happen to the would-be-mother?" Coldly, Cynthia responds. "That's up to a judge and a jury." Feeling guilty about his part in all of this Smith lashes out. "Shit! We all know that this thing should have never began nevertheless gone this far.

You and your boss can't win. All that you will accomplish is destroying this woman's life." The truce ends in silence. The silence is all so brief. Cynthia has lost her patience with these barber shop

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lawyers. She begins a tirade of her own. "Everyone is a damned lawyer! Well attorney Smith the D.A.'s office and two judges disagree with your expert evaluation of our case, but so what. We all simply went to law school and busted our butts in courtrooms over the last ten years or more. Again, what the hell do we know compared to you, a damn beat cop!" her intention is to ridicule Smith. The officer stands up over the diminutive Cynthia and stares down into her eyes. "I'll tell you what you lawyers know ... is how to manipulate the law to get the result that you want. This case will make your career ... won't it?" Smith accuses. Angry Cynthia tosses her drink into Smith's face. He raises his hand to slap her. That is when Lamp steps in and grabs the man's arm. The smarter of the two policemen, McDonald, pulls his partner away knowing that this is a fight he can't win even if he wins.

Pride forces Smith to return a verbal barrage. "If you weren't a broad I would knock your teeth out." Cynthia laughs. "If you tried you would be in for the surprise of your life because I would kick your ass," she promises.

The partner urges Smith from the bar. "It's getting a little stuffy in here. Let's get some air," McDonald advises Smith. As they exit the bar everyone hears Smith's disgruntled remarks, "Bitch! Because they want another trophy to mount on their resume walls that poor woman's world is going to be turned upside down," Smith rants on. The veteran cop is too busy complaining to his partner to notice that Lamp has followed them outside. "You're a joke. A month ago, when you screwed up the chain of evidence in the Mackey case, Cynthia bailed your butts out of the fire, by getting the evidence in

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anyway and locking up that prick. At that time you were singing her praises, but now when you don't agree with her suddenly she's a bitch. And who are you championing ... a woman who wants to kill her unborn child," Lamp reminds them. "There's something wrong with the baby? Right?" McDonald's convictions wane. "How could I forget. We live in an age where children are disposable. If they don't measure up we redesign them or place them in the discard pile," Lamp cynically replies. "That's not what I meant," Smith assures him. "Besides, the law says that she has the right to choose?" McDonald questions. "Maybe. That's what this trial will decide," Lamp answers him.

Swords are rattling all over town, they rattle even in the home of the governor. Henry's wife marches purposefully toward his study. As she stands in the open doorway staring at Henry her expression is stern and disapproving. The governor looks up. Knowing that look his wife wears he clears the room of his aides then turns his attention to his wife. "What have I done now?" he wonders aloud. "How many times have you argued with me in favor of the pro-life position? And now you take this woman's side against a good man like Bradley Dalton? I don't even know you." Standing up Henry walks over to the door opens it and looks out. He wants to be sure that no one is eavesdropping. "The party can't afford to address this issue, one way or the other, right now. There are just too many close races and this is too volatile a subject." Shaking her head in disapproval Shirley admonishes her husband, "I hope that you can live with that. You've compromised your beliefs for a few votes. I haven't always agreed with you, but I've always respected you ... at least until now." Shirley leaves Henry standing alone.

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There are no scarcity of opinions on this subject. The street corner lawyers express their legal opinions. Students at lunch break debate the right to privacy versus the right to life and the hypocrisy or medical merits of an unborn child not being legally alive. In the end all that the two sides can agree upon is that it will probably be a matter of politics rather than law which will have the final say in this matter.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 32
REFLECTIONS

The cold mason stones of her prison set the stage for the defeated Sharon Tomlin as she sits in her cell staring off into space. She remembers the barely eatable food she had left sitting on the mess hall table earlier. Even if it had been the greatest meal of all time from the finest restaurant in town it would have had little appeal to the soon to be defendant in a felony murder case. All she can do to keep from going crazy is to look back over the last few months and examine the choices she has made. Maybe somewhere among those choices there is an answer to how she has come to this point. She hopes that if she can find the answer to that question then maybe she might figure out how to repair her splintering world.

In stark contrast, across town, Dr. Harrison, the other defendant in this case is in front of a warm fireplace with a steak dinner his cook has prepared for him. His TV set is on, but Harrison is totally oblivious to what is showing. He too is looking back and wondering how it has all come to this. A colleague is caring for his patients. His phone is off of the hook. The doctor wishes to avoid news people and any more crank calls. He has always thought of himself as a good man. Then he remembers his sister Susan and he cries.

A TV dinner sits next to the keyboard of the computer where Walsh sits. A fresh faced kid straight out of law school invades her thoughts. Was she ever that young and naive? The lawyer remembers and wonders. Just out of law school, but lucky ... no, talented enough to be sitting second chair to the wily lawyer, Kennon Webb. Across from them sits

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another fresh faced attorney, Bradley Dalton. The young attorney is prosecuting his very first case. Her boss is so sure that he will chew this novice up and spit him out. When the smoke clears their client doesn't know what has hit him. Neither does her boss. Walsh remembers being in awe of this cocky young man. It is almost a year later before they meet socially. The Maryland Bar Association is holding their annual membership dinner. Barbara remembers the way Bradley had strutted into the room like a proud peacock with feathers displayed.

The talk of the dinner is this brilliant new assistant D.A. who is lighting up the courtrooms with his craftsmanship. The usually shy Walsh boldly approaches Bradley and asks if she can take him away from his friends. Remembering her from his first case Bradley is curious, so he agrees to go off with her. The two discuss past cases. They laugh at their similarities and also laugh at their differences. There is a definite bond formed between the two of them that night. Again being bolder than usual Barbara asks Bradley if he would like to take her home. Smiling, he looks down at his watch then answers, "You're a beautiful woman, intelligent and all that any man could ask of a woman, but I already have someone in my life. In fact I have to be getting home to her right now. It was a delight talking with you and I can hardly wait to face you in court." A disappointed Walsh feigns a smile. "She's a very lucky lady. Most men would have waited until breakfast to tell me, if they told me at all about the woman in their life." Bradley smiles. "Then they're fools. To treat someone as special as you so badly and to risk something so good on the roll of the die that they wouldn't get caught. They would have to be fools." Barbara then pushes Bradley

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toward door of the ballroom. "Go before I make a bigger fool of myself and tell you that I still want you to take me home." Tenderly he kisses Barbara on the cheek then leaves out.

A concerned Cynthia worries about Bradley. A few days ago she had started home when warning bells sent her in another direction. Arriving at the Dalton home she had found Bradley sitting in the dark watching an old home video of he and Janet. Is this video generation lucky or unlucky? Once we held our memories of loved ones in the confines of our heart. With time the images of lost ones faded and we were able to move on to new relationships. Today we can push a button and the frozen slices of time in a box vividly returns us to that which we may be better off forgetting.

Alone in the dark Bradley sits. The only illumination in the room coming from the pictures on the television screen. The pictures that are showing Janet the first time she was pregnant. A Time when a perfect life seemed very much within their reach. Bradley had been driven to the VCR by the inane prattle of news reporters. Some of them dared to speak about him as if they were his best friend and privy to some level of understanding of his motivations. Telling the world about Bradley's loss and painting him to be some vigilante crusader. Those fools can't break in on the tapes.

The first sound he hears is Janet's laughter. The first image - her swinging back and forth in a swing as he pushes her. It is almost as if he is in the park again. He can feel the warm sunlight on his skin, the light breeze upon his face, while the smell of the recently blossoming trees and flowers

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dance upon his nostrils. None of this is as intoxicating as remembering the perfume of his wife's sweet body, seemingly close yet so far away. Then like a knife the chime of her soft voice gleefully pleading, "Not so high, not so high." Bradley's own voice then mocks him as he watches the tape, "I will never let anything happen to you." The video continues playing. In the tape Bradley grabs a hold of the swing and stops it. Janet leans back and they kiss. "I love you," he whispers tenderly. "After getting me knocked up you better had be in love with me," Janet teases.

He didn't remember the doorbell ringing or calling out to his unwelcome guest to enter, but there Cynthia stood, next to the television. "You shouldn't be watching this," she scolds her friend. As she reaches for the power button Bradley leaps up from the couch and roughly grabs her arm. "Oww! You're hurting me," she informs him. Cynthia pulls her arm away from the VCR. Bradley releases his hold on her wrist. He says, "I'm sorry, but I don't need another mother. I still have one of those." Not believing how cold he is acting toward her a concerned Cynthia asks him, "How about a friend? Do you need one of those?" In an icy tone he responds, "Right now I only need an excellent assistant to help me win this case."

Cynthia turns and heads for the door. Stopping once on her way out she turns to him and asks, "What does it profit a man to win the world if he should lose his soul?" Empty are Bradley's eyes and heart as he answers his friend, "When Janet died I lost my soul, so all I have left is to win some small victory. One that may make some sense of my great loss. Now if you don't mind ... good night." Bradley

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curtly dismisses her. Not caring for the way she is dismissed Cynthia strikes out verbally, "I forgot, you want to get back to your home movies." Without another word being spoken between them Cynthia exits the Dalton home.

Sitting alone enshrouded by loneliness Bradley reflects on his friend's words. But then everything is forgotten when the sound of Janet's laughter once more fills the room. There is no need for reflections, because the lilt of her laughter has transported him back to a time when love was vibrant and alive.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 33
FIRST VOLLEY

The only thing missing from the courtroom scene is a group of clowns climbing out of a miniature car. The courtroom is filled with all sorts of riff raft. The back wall of the court is lined with reporters. The court room security has been beefed up. There are three additional deputy sheriffs, for a total of four - including the sheriff himself, along with the bailiff, Jimmy. Bradley makes his entrance into the courtroom to a chorus of cheers, from the pro-lifers, and jeers, from the pro - choice forces. The bailiff shouts out for order in the court and the crowd quiets to murmurs and whispers. Bradley sits down at the prosecution table. Having gotten an early start Cynthia has been sitting there for over twenty minutes waiting. Looking across the courtroom the D.A. spots Walsh, Sharon, Dr. Harrison and Anna-Walsh's assistant all sitting at the defense table. There is an unmistakable aura of doom looming over these proceedings.

Finally the door to the judge's chamber opens and his honor, Judge Barkham, enters the courtroom to the unacceptable disrespect of jeers from the pro-choice people. Two of the deputies escort some of the rabble roisters from the courtroom. The bailiff steps forward. He shouts again, "Order in the court! All rise for the honorable Judge Anthony Barkham." Everyone rises. An angry Judge Barkham makes his way to the bench and takes a seat. "You may be seated," the bailiff instructs. The judge wears a scowl that could stop time. A hush falls over the proceedings. The authoritarian Barkham speaks, "I understand that this is a subject which strikes close to the hearts of many of you and I am a strong advocate for public participation in the judicial process, but make no

FIRST VOLLEY

about this, I do not allow any foolishness in my courtroom. I will send you to jail. If that fails to quiet the proceedings I will clear the courtroom of the remaining spectators. That being said let's proceed."

The judge then turns his attention to Walsh. "Miss Walsh are you ready to proceed with your opening statement?" he asks. "Yes I am your honor." Walsh states as she stands. "Proceed," Barkham instructs her.

All eyes are upon Barbara Walsh as she nears the jury box. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I could give you a lengthy statement of the text of the law and the issues in question here today, but I won't. The reasons I won't are twofold. For one my client doesn't have the luxury of time on her side, so I must resolve this matter quickly. The other reason being, my clients should not even be here. They have broken no law. Turning her back on the jury she walks over to stand in front of the bench and stares up at Barkham. "I have nothing but the highest regards for Judge Barkham and this court, but this is a Superior court, a lower court to the Supreme Court of these United States, which is the final arbitrator of the law. The Supreme Court has already decided this issue in their decision in the case of Roe vs Wade," she explains. The wily attorney suddenly turns to the jury and uses the timber of her voice to impress upon the jury the importance of her next statement. "Until the end of the first trimester of a pregnancy a woman can abort her pregnancy for any reason, if she so chooses." Wanting the jury's attention on Sharon, Barbara turns and faces her client. "Even if my client had no other reason except an unplanned pregnancy, by

FIRST VOLLEY

law she can abort her pregnancy in the first trimester. Miss Sharon Tomlin, is still in her first trimester and wants with all her heart to have this child, yet she chooses not to be that selfish. You see she has been advised that her child will be born severely retarded and shall never enjoy even the most simple of pleasures, such as loving and being loved or having its own children. So don't punish my client, no ... don't punish my client's child just because Mr. Dalton," she turns and points to the prosecutor. "... has decided that he doesn't care for the law of the land. Thank you." Sharon's attorney walks over to the defense table and sits down next to her clients.

The silence of the courtroom is shattered by Bradley clapping. The judge looks down at him menacingly. Jumping to her feet Barbara yells, "I object!" Barkham lets everyone know where he stands. "Objection sustained. I won't have any theatrics in my courtroom Mr. Dalton. Do we understand one another?" Not wanting to antagonize the court Bradley meekly replies, "Yes your honor. I apologize to the court." He then walks toward the jury box. Quietly Bradley begins his opening barrage, "I am not a monster. I sympathize with Ms. Tomlin's plight, but I can't allow this travesty of justice to occur. What is best for the child ...? Seems obviously the domain of the parent. And it is ... within reason. The law says that a person doesn't even have the right to take their own life so how can we reasonably assume that you can be delegated that right. The law also demands, yes, demands that a parent risk their own life to protect the life of their child." Slowly, Bradley walks over to the prosecution table and takes a drink of water, allowing his words time to sink into the minds of the jury then he stares at them again. "The issue

FIRST VOLLEY

you must discern has nothing to do with rather or not Ms. Tomlin's child will be born retarded or her right to protect that child from an empty life. She clearly has no such right. The issue here and the reason that there is a trial is that you must decide did the Supreme Court contradict themselves when they established the first trimester or viability as the only legal definition for life as it pertains to the unborn child and thus deprive these children of their constitutional rights. In other cases the Supreme Court has said that they frown on these Irrebuttable Presumptions, a single definition for person, when there are other viable definitions for person. They also stated in their opinions in Roe vs Wade that there were other viable definitions for person as it pertained to the unborn child. Yet they chose the politically expedient definition. A definition which gave both sides some of what they wanted. Pro-choice got a window in which to abort a pregnancy and for pro-life advocates for the larger part of the pregnancy the unborn child is protected. Luckily for the unborn children it is not your job to seek a compromise. It is your job to afford them the total protection of the law. I want to thank you in advance for your time and attention in this complex legal matter," he ends his opening statement, turns then walks away.

Everyone seems to be rolling his words over and over again in their minds. Maybe that's how Benjamin was able to get pass the security and close enough to Sharon to toss a balloon filled with red dye onto her white dress.

The mad man, Benjamin then began his tirade, screaming at the now hysterical young woman. "Baby killer! Baby killer!"

FIRST VOLLEY

Two of the deputies rush to his side and restrain him. A startled judge Barkham glares down at Benjamin then turns a sympathetic eye to Sharon. "Miss Tomlin, I can't begin to express to you this courts repulsion over this man's actions. Sheriff I want this man placed under arrest. He is to be charged with contempt of court and assault and battery upon Miss Tomlin's person." The sheriff walks over to his deputies then handcuffs Benjamin. The two deputies drag Torn out of the court as he screams back, "I did nothing wrong! She's the one! She's the one!"

The door to the courtroom closes behind Benjamin and the two deputies. The spectators are all in a state of shock. A buzz of murmurs fills the courtroom. Judge Barkham bangs his gavel. Quiet settles like a cloud over all. "Listen and listen good," the judge menacingly instructs. "I don't care what side of this issue you may be on I will not allow my courtroom to be disrupted in any way ... and I surely will not tolerate anyone showing a disregard for the law in my courtroom!" he bellows.

As Sharon wipes the splattering of red dye from her cheeks she weeps. Looking over at the distraught woman Barkham announces, "Due to the lateness of the hour and in consideration of Miss Tomlin this court is adjourned until tomorrow morning at 8:00 a.m." He slams down his gavel.

The battle had commenced and the first volleys have been served by all.

IRREBUTTABLE PESUMPTION
CHAPTER 34
A FOOL UNLEASHED

Dressed in army fatigues and combat boots with the appearance of a member of some crackpot fringe militia group Benjamin Torn rattles his saber, spouting obscenities and threats toward all of the pro-choice institutions. Tired of his tirades one deputy shouts back at him, "If you don't shut up that noise I will come back there and put my foot up your butt." Always thinking of himself as the hero, Benjamin is not about to back down. "You and what army, chump?" is his reply. The first officer gets up from his seat, and starts back, but is stopped by his friend and fellow officer. "Ignore him. He's a crazy fool."

A short time later Benjamin, being held at the court facilities, is on the phone to a friend, Tim, who is also a member of a radical pro - life group which believes like Torn does that the end justifies the means. "Can you believe this shit?" an amazed Benjamin asks his friend. "I'm trying to save a life and they put me in jail." Silently Benjamin listens to Tim's response. "I need you to come down here and bail me out. The creeps set my bail at ten thousand. You have to have a thousand for the bondsman." Again he waits for Tim's reply then sighs, "Thanks. I knew that I could count on you guys." Then he hangs up. As the misguided Torn awaits his friend's arrival he continues his tirades, "God damned system! Got me, a god fearing man, in here with the scum of the earth - damned murders, thieves, dope fiends and whatever. I hate you all! " A black cellmate takes offense and heads menacingly toward him. Being trained in the martial arts Benjamin is not intimidated by the man's girth. "I hear you like to pick on pregnant women," the huge black man says. "Only the whores

A FOOL UNLEASHED

that would kill their own babies," the disturbed Benjamin proudly admits. The cellmate lets out a guttural scream and swings at Benjamin. Torn ducks under the punch and kicks the man in the groin. The black man doubles over. Like some animal who has established himself as the leader of the pack the victor lets out a roar, challenging all of those who remain. "Anyone else have a problem with my politics?" The cell door opens. The deputy sheriff calls out, "Benjamin Torn! Torn! Someone has made your bail." Even among thieves and worst everyone is glad to be rid of this malevolent force.

Soon the property sergeant is handing Benjamin an envelope with his possessions and asking for his signature on the release forms. In an attempt to get back at the officers by annoying them he slowly goes through the items in the envelope. "Have to be careful. There ain't much difference between the crooks and the cops now-a-days," he taunts, staring at the sergeant. The sergeant ignores him. After being processed Benjamin turns to leave. The policeman figures it's his turn to rattle Benjamin's cage. "See you when you come back." Turning and facing the policeman, Benjamin losses his cool. "Fuck you! I'm not one of your career criminals. I'm a man of principles." The sergeant laughs. "My mistake. I guess if I want to see you again I'm going to have to visit you out at the State Mental institution." Other cops and some of the criminals laugh at the joke. Torn gives the sergeant the finger then leaves out.

Tim waits for the man he considers a friend in the main lobby of the courtroom. Spotting Ben he runs over to his friend and hugs him. "That was fast," Tim comments. "It's like I always say - the truth

A FOOL UNLEASHED

will set you free!" the foolhardy man screams at the top of his lungs. The people around Benjamin stare at him as if he is crazy. Noting their disdain for his actions Benjamin verbally attacks those passing by, "What the hell are you looking at?" One of the deputy sheriffs walks over to Benjamin and Tim. He warns Ben, "Unless you want to be arrested again you had better move on." Tim pulls on Benjamin's arm. "I can't afford to bail you out again, so let's go." Glaring at the officer Torn lets loose one last tirade, "You're all a part of this sick system. You're all gonna be dealt with." The two men leave the courthouse. The officer who had threatened to arrest Benjamin turns to his colleague. "I probably should have arrested him for disturbing the peace. You mark my words that psycho is going to do something to make me regret that I didn't." The second officer tells his friend, "We can't arrest all of the nuts out there just because we believe that they may do something. If we did we would soon run out of jail space."

At a small raunchy bar near the courthouse the two extremists sit having drinks. "Man, you've been on the news all day today. That was so cool. The way you showed that bitch up." Tim was in awe of his sick mentor. "We have to show them! We have to show them all!" Ben screams. The bartender shouts at the two men. "This ain't that kind of bar. If you can't keep it down you're gonna have to hit the bricks." Standing up Tim faces the bartender. "We don't want no trouble. Just want to enjoy our drinks." Tim sits back down. "Damn wimp. I could break that little pencil neck geek in half without breaking a sweat," Ben assures his friend. Tim tries to control his friend with words, "I know that you can, but we have more important shit to worry about, so let's cool

A FOOL UNLEASHED

out on him."

As morning turns into afternoon the two men still linger at the court side bar. It's now time for the bartenders to change shifts. The first bartender warns the new bartender that Tim and Ben have had enough and that he thinks that they may be trouble. Overhearing the conversation Ben glares at the older man. The older bartender leaves out as Ben signals to the new man to order drinks. Cautiously he approaches the two men. Meekly the new bartender explains, "I can't serve you any more drinks. I could lose my job if I do." At first Ben grabs the bartender by his collar, but soon releases him. "Let's get the hell out of here," he tells Tim. The second bartender sighs. He is relieved as the two men exit the bar. The unlucky first bartender had found that his car battery was dead. He is returning to the bar to call triple A when he bumps into Tim and Ben. Torn grabs the man by his arm. The bartender pulls his arm free of Ben's grasp. "You think that you're so smart, don't you? Who are you to tell us where to go or how much we can drink?" Ben questions. "Look buddy. You're drunk. I don't want to hurt you, but if you don't get out of my face I will," he warns. To his surprise Ben strikes him aside the head, knocking him to ground. Tim and Ben begin kicking the man while he is down. Then Ben jumps down onto the man and grabs him around his neck. Tim watches helpless as Ben twists and snaps the bartender's neck. Like the cracking of a tree limb the sickening sound fills the air. The bartender lies dead in Ben's arms. Grabbing Ben by his arm Tim pulls him to his feet. The two men run up an alley and away from the grizzly murder scene.

Later that day Tim sits across from Ben in Ben's

A FOOL UNLEASHED

apartment. Glaring at the man he has called his friend Tim wonders what he should do. How had drinking at a bar involved him in a murder? This isn't about saving children for Torn. None of it had been. Only now does Tim realize that this man is a loose cannon that will kill at the slightest provocation, even he may not be exempt from this mad man's wrath. "You have to know that they are going to let that bitch go. She's going to kill her baby. We have to do something," Ben insists. "That Bradley guy. He's one of the best lawyers in the country. Maybe he can win? Maybe the killing can finally stop ... on both sides," a weary Tim replies. "Are you tired of fighting for the children, Tim?" Ben asks as he gets up from his seat and makes his way around behind Tim. "I'm pro-life. To me that means I'm for everyone living," a nervous Tim explains. Staring straight ahead Tim feels the menacing presence of Ben behind him. As he forecast earlier the mad man wraps his hands around Tim's throat and chokes the life from him.

The former radical is dead. His body slumps down beneath the table. Benjamin's icy stare seems to condemn Tim before he speaks the words, "This is war and in a war one must execute traitors. And just like I made an example of you I will also make an example of this Sharon Tomlin. Fear will win this war. With god as my witness ...," he raises his hand in the air as if making a solemn pledge.

Still dressed in his army uniform and carrying some provisions and a thermos filled with booze the tortured man sits across the street from the courthouse. "If they let her go ... and I know that they will, I will be here waiting," he tells himself.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 35
FREE OF FEAR

Fear can be like an albatross about one's neck, inescapably dragging one down to the watery depths of despair. Bernice Tomlin has too long lived with this unwelcome weight. Today in court she had been so afraid that someone might discover that she was Sharon's mother that most of the day she cowers in the hallways outside the courtroom rather than go in and be a support for her daughter in her hour of need. When the court day had ended, ashamed she slithered away.

Glad to at last be home again Bernice looks about her fortress against the world's judgments and woes and wonders if it isn't more her prison than her protection. In either case it is about to be breached.

Clarice has watched her friend in court today and she has hurt for her friend. Not so much for the events which have transpired, but because she has seen what had gone unnoticed by everyone else. Sharon had kept looking around the courtroom hoping against hope to find her mother there, supporting her. The day had come and gone and there was no sign of Bernice. That is why Clarice now stands outside of Bernice's apartment ringing her doorbell. Slowly the door opens. The mother is far from surprised to find Clarice there. "I can't say that I'm surprised to see you. Come in." For the first time ever Bernice invites Clarice into her home.

As the door closes Bernice goes on the defense. "I guess that you're here to tell me how horrible a mother I am." The two women enter into the living room and have a seat. "I didn't come here to fight

FREE OF FEAR

with you Miss Tomlin." Clarice tells her friend's mother. "Then why did you come?" Bernice wants to know. "Today in court my friend, your daughter, was in the battle of her life. Despite this fact she spent most of the day staring around the court. She was desperately seeking you, her mother, desperately needing your support. Hoping with all of her heart that at the moment when she feel most alone in the world that her mother would show her that unconditional love that she has searched for her whole life," Clarice explains. Touched by the friend's words Bernice breaks down and cries. In between her tears she tells Clarice her story, "I was there today. Out in the halls. Each time the court doors would open I would scamper to a safe place to hide and watch my daughter." Unable to contain herself any longer Clarice blows up at her friend's mother, "She didn't need you in the hallways! Sharon needs you by her side!" Lowering her head in shame Bernice tries to make Clarice understand. "I couldn't be there. When I was younger than Sharon, seventeen, I thought about having an abortion. I wanted to have Sharon, but her father had abandoned me. I was frightened. My father told me that if I had an abortion I would be damned for eternity in god's eyes. I was afraid of my father. I was afraid of god, but most of all I was afraid of the idea of eternal damnation, so I had Sharon." Bernice laughs happily. "There hasn't been a day since she was born that I haven't been glad that I had her, but I'm still afraid." The friend still doesn't understand. "That's all in the past. What are you afraid of now?" Clarice wants to know. "The same old things; afraid of what people think, afraid of men like the man who threw the red paint on Sharon, afraid that I can't be the strong mother that my daughter deserves and needs right now," she

FREE OF FEAR

answers. The two women hug one another. Clarice lends her strength to Bernice. "It's alright to be afraid, but it's never alright to abandon the people we love because we're afraid. Come to court with me tomorrow," Clarice employs her. The mother smiles and says, "I can't promise that I'll be strong enough to stay, but I will come." They embrace once more.

The next day the courtroom has the same circus like atmosphere as the day before. Clarice is oblivious to everything around her. The foremost thing on her mind is the continued absence of Bernice. Judge Barkham is on the bench and the trial is about to begin again. The doors to the courtroom swing open. Bernice enters. The self conscious mother can feel every eye in the court upon her. Still she marches defiantly down the center aisle of the courtroom until she reaches the row behind the defense table. She moves in next to Clarice and behind Sharon. The mother leans across the railing and hugs her daughter. They both cry. One of the deputies separate the two women.

A buzz spreads throughout the court. Once more Barkham slams down his gavel. "Order in the court! Order in the court!" he demands. Turning his attention to Bernice the judge questions her, "And who are you Miss?" Innocently pointing to herself, questioning if the judge is referring to her, then changing her demeanor to proud and defiant Bernice announces, "Sir, my name is Bernice Tomlin. I am Sharon Tomlin's mother, your honor," a small smile creases Barkham's lips. The crowd noise increases again and Barkham answers it with his gavel once more. "The next time that I have to ask for order I am going to clear this court," he threatens. A hush

FREE OF FEAR

falls over the court.

Glancing from prosecutor to defense attorney Barkham asks, "Are either of you intending to call the mother as a witness?" Both lawyers shake their heads, answering no. With that settled the judge turns to Bernice again. "You may have a seat Ms. Tomlin, but in the future I would appreciate it if you made a less dramatic entrance into my courtroom." Timidly Bernice answers, "Yes sir," then sits down. The friend and mother turn to one another and hug.

All it took was one act of courage to set Bernice free from her prison.

We all have our moments of fear, but for the most part we go through this life oblivious to its dangers. Now Bernice can walk with the rest of us.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 36
POLICE TESTIMONY

Nervously officer McDonald sits upon the stand. At first pacing back and forth in front of him then stopping Walsh turns and faces him. "Officer, in your experience was this a typical arrest?" she asks him. "I'm not sure what you mean," he says. "Is it customary for a member of the D.A.'s office to accompany you or other officers when you arrest someone?" she restates her question. "No." he was short and to the point. "Was it customary for a member of the D.A.'s office to be active in investigating a crime?" she asks the police officer. McDonald looks at Bradley. The D.A. frowns. Hoping to prevent any coaching Walsh steps in between Bradley and McDonald. "No. But it isn't totally uncommon," McDonald lies. Bradley smiles. Barbara looks at the jury as she continues to question McDonald, "Would you say 30% of investigations are handled this way?" Shaking his head the officer answers, "No." Moving closer to the jury Barbara continues, "Less? More?" Again he looks at Bradley. "Less," is McDonald's answer. Barbara continues, "5%. 1%? Or is it less?" The officer reluctantly answers, "Probably less." At this point Barbara places her hands on the rail of the jury box and speaks to the jury. "I don't know about you, ladies and gentlemen, but to me 1% is an uncommon occurrence." Bradley jumps up. "I object your honor. If Ms. Walsh wants to testify I would be glad to swear her in and cross exam her." Barkham glares at Walsh and Bradley. "Objection sustained. Let the jury draw their own conclusions Ms. Walsh," Barkham instructs.

Being an astute litigator Barbara has no intention of letting McDonald off of the witness stand without

POLICE TESTIMONY

him giving her something that she needs. "Officer McDonald, are you familiar with Roe vs Wade?" she asks. The cagey Bradley knows where she is going and he will stop her if he can. "Objection your honor. Officer McDonald is not a lawyer." Quickly Walsh responds to Bradley's objection. "As a police officer he is charged with having a rudimentary understanding of the laws that he is to enforce," she points out. Barkham nods his head in agreement as he speaks, "Overruled. Miss Walsh is correct. Officer McDonald should know the law." Barbara turns to face the witness box. "Again, officer McDonald are you familiar with Roe vs Wade?" The officer nods his head as he answers, "Of course I am." The defense attorney turns and faces the jury once more. Staring into the eyes of each juror one after another she again questions McDonald, "To your understanding of Roe vs Wade did you believe that you had any grounds to arrest my clients?" Bradley starts to object, but he notices the officer shaking his head, signaling him. "The D.A.'s office was supervising the arrest and I trust that being lawyers that they know more about the law than I do, so I had no reason to doubt the validity of the arrest," he skirts around the question. There is no way Barbara is going to let him get away with that," she pleads with the court. "Your honor instruct the witness to answer yes or no. His answer was non-responsive." Barkham agrees with Barbara's assessment of the officer's response. Not wanting McDonald to be any clearer in his response Bradley objects. Barkham overrules Bradley's objection and instructs McDonald to answer yes or no. Just as Bradley had feared McDonald's reply was in the negative. Barbara ends her cross and returns to her seat next to Sharon.

POLICE TESTIMONY

There is no denying that Walsh has delivered some healthy blows, but Bradley has no intention of letting the damage stand unanswered. "Would you like to cross examine the witness Mr. Dalton?" the judge asks. "Most definitely your honor." The lawyer answers as he walks over to the witness stand. "Officer McDonald just like Ms. Walsh the prosecution values your opinion also, so I would like to know who, in your professional opinion is best able to determine the legal merits of a case a police officer such as yourself or the attorneys at the D.A.'s office?" Looking straight at the jury the police officer answers, "Without a doubt the attorneys at the D.A.'s office." Bradley doesn't want to leave any doubts in the jury's mind so he goes even further with this line of questioning, "And why do you say that officer McDonald?" Again the policeman stares straight into the eyes of each of the jury members. "Because for all of my experience I am not a lawyer and therefore rely heavily on the expertise of the D.A.'s office for an interpretation of the more complex legal issues such as are involved in Roe vs Wade and this case," he carefully structures his answer. "No further questions." Bradley states as he turns and walks back to the prosecution table.

"This court is adjourned until 8:00 am tomorrow morning." Barkham again knocks with his gavel. "Court adjourned!"

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 37
HEAVY SIBLING

The prosecution team of Lamp, Cynthia and Bradley sit around their usual haunt having dinner. Half empty plates sit in front of Lamp and Cynthia. Bradley's food has barely been touched. There are many other patrons in the restaurant and waitresses carrying trays of food and even music plays to distract them from thoughts of work. One waitress approaches their table then she stops there. "Can I get you anything else?" she asks. Cynthia asks for a glass of water. Lamp says that he is fine. Bradley hurries her away so that he can get back to the matter at hand, the case.

"Neither Smith nor McDonald gained us any ground with the jurors. If anything they are probably more confused than ever. It is important that we destroy the credibility of Dr. Harrison as a witness and Miss Tomlin's vulnerable mother image." Bradley turns to Lamp. "Have you found any dirt on this guy?" Lamp shakes his head. "This guy is the most squeaky clean person I've ever known. This guy is cleaner than that 99% pure soap." Lamp points out. "I don't want to hear that. Everyone has an Achilles heel. Find his!" Bradley demands.

An exasperated Bradley instructs Lamp, "In case we have to get dirty find me something on his family, his sex life, find me anything, but don't have me in there trying to depose some St. Harrison of B-more." Getting up from the table Lamp looks down at Bradley. "Don't worry. I'll find something. No one is this good a person." Cynthia frowns and tosses an insult at Lamp. "At least not in your dirty world." Lamp starts to speak, but realizes the futility of

debating the horrors of the world as dinner conversation. Instead he turns and leaves out.

It's five o'clock and Lamp has a lead to follow before it gets too late. The two attorneys sit staring at one another. "Although Harrison is important Ms. Tomlin is the key to our case. No matter how strong our points of law may seem if the jury sympathizes or empathizes with her we won't win. The cocky Cynthia assures him that she will have Sharon so confused that she won't even know her own name, nevertheless know if what she's doing is right or wrong. Bradley warns her to be careful in how she questions Sharon as well. They don't want the jury to perceive of the prosecution as persecutors of this vulnerable young woman "I will make her look pathetic and us like her saviors," Cynthia tries to convince herself as much as Bradley.

The mood changes when Cynthia wonders aloud, "Why are you doing this?" Up until now Bradley has been unwilling to talk about his motivations, but this is a friend reaching out to him, so he answers, "Janet knew that having a baby could kill her, but she tried anyway. I couldn't save her or our unborn child, but maybe I can save these other children and maybe in the cosmic scheme of things my loss will have served some purpose." The two friends sit quietly.

At home Lamp searches the internet for information on the seemingly immaculate Dr. Harrison. He anticipates a long night. Luckily things come together quickly after he finds the doctor's parents' wedding certificates. It becomes easy for him to begin to build a profile of the Harrison's.

HEAVY SIBLING

family.

About sixty five years ago, in simpler times, a Jane Lawson married a John Harrison. County assessment records show that two years later they bought a house. Census records show that two years later they had their first child, Kirk - Dr. Harrison, and a year later another child, Susan. There are no more children after Susan. Oddly county records show just a year after the birth of their second child the Harrison's are divorced. Jane Lawson Harrison dies at the age of 44.

The keys on his PC sing as his fingers dances across them. There seems to be few records of the sister after grade school, a very special grade school. It seems that she has never had a social security card. No marriage license. Nothing. Lamp's curiosity is aflame. "Did someone intentionally expunge this woman's records from the data banks?" he wonders. "Naw. It was a bit much to believe some great conspiracy. There had to be a simpler answer." In a flash it came to him. An accident or parental abuse. Surely something had happened to the sister at a very young age. There isn't a death certificate, so she is still alive. A nursing home? He knows that he is right.

The unrelenting Lamp browses through the records of the local nursing homes. Voila! There she is. Susan Harrison, the daughter of Jane Lawson and John Harrison. The inquisitive Lamp sits staring at the PC screen at the words Shady Acres. "I would love to know why she was admitted there. Why she's never had a life?" Lamp wonders.

It is 6:00 am when Lamp drives up the lane to Shady

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Acres Sanitarium. The area where the institution is located is so quiet and peaceful, nestled in this countryside setting. The investigator gets out of his car, walks up the walkway then enters the main building.

Inside the walls are a stark hospital white. Lamp notes that there is an eerie almost suspense movie type feel to Shady Acres. The feeling is quickly forgotten when he spots the very beautiful nurse Brenda Jacobs standing at the nurse's station. Brenda looks up, spots Lamp and smiles. "Beautiful lady. You can be of the greatest assistance to me this morning," he flatters her. "My mother warned me, beware of men who start a conversation with flattery. She told me that they are usually trying to get you to give them something that it would be wise for you to withhold," she notes. They both laugh. "Your mother was a very smart lady, but I am a very charming man. And as we both know the charming man wins out over mom's sage advice every time," he counters. Leaning over the station desk she whispers sensuously into Lamp's ear, "What do you want? More important, what can a poor, lonely, single lady like myself get in return for my help?" A mischievous smile crosses Lamp's lips as he gives Brenda her answer, "I need a copy of my sick aunt's medical file. In return I will take you out, tonight, to the finest restaurant in the city. There I will wine you and dine you in the fashion a woman such as yourself deserves," he offers his bribe. "You're such a liar, a con and a flirt," she accuses. "Is that a bad thing?" The investigator kids. Brenda giggles like a school girl. An orderly pushes a cart full of hospital linens by the conspirators. He looks Brenda and Lamp up and down suspiciously. The two are silent until the orderly

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has wheeled the cart down the hall, around the corner and out of their sight.

Not believing that the person Lamp wants information about is his aunt, but not willing to pass up an opportunity to go out to dinner with this good looking man Brenda excuses what she is about to do by telling herself no one is going to be harmed by it. "Let me get this straight, if I give you your sick aunt's file you are going to treat me to dinner at a fine French restaurant?" she asks. "And if you would like I will even serve you breakfast in bed consisting of croissants and eggs Benedict," he offers suggestively. "You are so nasty," Brenda says, blushing. "Yes I am." Lamp assures her.

The nurse looks up and down the corridor before she settles in at the computer station to commit her illegal act. "I could lose my job for this." she tells herself as much as him. "You're not going to tell anyone, I'm not going to tell anyone," then looking around Lamp continues, "... and there is no one else around." Brenda starts typing. "What's your aunt's name?" she asks. "Susan Harrison," he answers. Brenda types in the name and pushes the print button. The printer begins printing out the file.

Mesmerized by the machine Brenda and Lamp watch as the file is being printed out. As the papers shoot from the printer a Dr. Henn walks up behind them undetected. He looks at the two of them suspiciously. "What's going on, Brenda?" he asks. Startled, Brenda jumps. "Dear god. You scared the day lights out of me," she answers. "That doesn't answer my question." With as innocent a facade as she can manage Brenda smiles up at Dr. Henn then she

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answers his inquiry, "I'm compiling some data for Dr. Fish for when he gets back from vacation."

Henn feels guilty for having suspected the nurse so he makes his excuses and quickly walks away. Almost about to faint Brenda glares at Lamp and exclaims, "Oh my god! That was too close for comfort!" Lamp laughs and shakes his head in disbelief. "Who do you think that you're jiving? You loved the excitement of almost being caught. It made you feel like one of those "Bond Girls." He seems to see deep down into her very soul. "You just met me and you think you know me already, do you?" Confidently the investigator nods his head. "Yes I do." Brenda laughs.

"It just happens that this time you're right, but there's a lot more to me than you could ever begin to guess." Wanting to seem sexy and mysterious Brenda tosses her hair back and turns quickly to the computer just as the last of the file is being fed from the printer. Taking the documents from the printer she offers them to Lamp. As he examines the paperwork Brenda writes down her name and phone number on a separate piece of paper and hands that to Lamp. He looks at the paper, puzzled. "My name and phone number. 7:00 tonight," Brenda instructs him. "You couldn't pay me to miss it," Lamp assures her. She smiles.

Later that day, court is already in session. The courtroom doors bursts open and Lamp rushes in. Dr. Harrison is already in the witness box. Walsh stands a few feet away from him about to begin her cross examination. Behind Barbara there are charts and diagrams drawn on a board which sits on a tripod. She begins, "Dr. Harrison ...," but she is interrupted

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by the buzz in the courtroom which had started when Lamp made his way to the defense table. The attorney pleads with the court to be allowed to continue. Lamp hands the file to Bradley then leans over and whispers in his ear. "Do you mind? Some of us are trying to carry on a trial here, Mr. Dalton," Barkham barks sarcastically.

A light round of laughter follows the judge's jab. The attorney apologizes then looks down at the papers he holds. Bradley knows that revelations of a sister's life may save many lives. Barbara turns to Barkham totally exasperated by the confusion being caused by the sharing of information between Bradley and Cynthia. "May I proceed with my cross your honor?" she asks. Menacingly the judge stares at Bradley and Cynthia. "I'm not sure Ms. Walsh. Maybe we should ask the prosecution. Mr. Dalton, is it alright with you and your colleague if we would like to proceed with the matter of this trial?" he says in a menacing tone. "I'm sorry for the interruptions your honor." Bradley tries to soothe the judge.

Tired of what he perceives as stalling tactics Barkham issues an ultimatum, "My patience is wearing thin, so I shall make myself perfectly clear this time." Barkham's voice trembles with anger. "It is of great importance that we proceed quickly and judiciously in this case. That is the only way to insure that all the parties to this action rights are duly protected. With this in mind, I assure you that I shall be totally intolerant of any more interruptions in these proceedings. Does everyone understand me?" Barkham asks. The courtroom is silent. Barkham's voice thunders throughout the court, "Does everyone understand me?!" he repeats. The court is filled with persons answering yes, in

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tones from a whisper to a hearty shout. Barkham smiles then turns his attention back to Walsh. "You may proceed Ms. Walsh."

Hesitating only for the briefest of moments, to check on her adversaries, Barbara begins again. "Dr. Harrison, so far you have shown us charts and graphs and you have spoken about Ms. Tomlin's condition in medical terms, but could you break these terms down so that a layman might understand what affect this would all bear upon her pregnancy," she asks of the doctor. The nervous Dr. Harrison fidgets upon the witness stand. He then looks around apprehensively before beginning his answer, "There is a blockage which has prevented the needed nutrients from being passed to the fetus. As a result of this the child's brain will not develop as it should have and the child will be born severely retarded and shall remain so for the length of its life. The chances of this child developing the most elementary cognitive or reasoning skills are slim," interrupting the doctor Walsh interjects, "As my grandma would say, the child won't understand dirt." Bradley jumps to his feet and angrily shouts, "Objection!" Quickly the wily defense attorney apologizes for her statement. Immediately she returns to cross examining the doctor. "Can you give us a brief description of what the child's life may be like." Walsh asks. "Actually your grandma's colorful expression is an accurate description. The child will probably have little in the way of true communicative skills, only an innate understanding of relationships and no capacity for independent living," he explains. Feeling that she has successfully drawn a picture of Sharon's desperate choice Walsh turns and walks away from the doctor. "That will be all Dr. Harrison."

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The judge looks over at Bradley, who is still browsing through the file that he was given. "Do you wish to cross examine this witness Mr. Dalton?" Barkham asks. Placing the file down upon the prosecution table, getting up and walking toward the doctor Bradley assures judge Barkham that he does have questions for the learned doctor. "Yes I do, your honor."

The jury watches as Bradley stands silently staring at the charts and graphs, but saying nothing. A cynical laugh escapes Bradley as he turns his attention back to Harrison. "All these charts and graphs, all the fancy medical jargon and it all boils down to a guess. Isn't that correct doctor?" Bradley questions. "I don't understand what you mean." Harrison answers confused. "You don't know for a fact that this child will be born retarded. Do you?" Bradley rebukes Harrison's testimony. "Anything is possible sir, but all the indicators suggest otherwise." Harrison confidently states. "Do you perform abortions at the drop of a hat doctor?" the prosecutor asks. "Objection your honor. Argumentative. The D.A. is trying to get a rise out of my client." Walsh accuses calmly. "Sustained" Barkham agrees. "Mr. Dalton don't test me." The judge warns. "Have you performed many abortions doctor?" Bradley restates his question. "No I haven't!" Harrison answers, now becoming annoyed with the district attorney. "This is not something that I take lightly," he assures the court. "In my thirty years of practicing medicine I have only performed one such procedure before," he hopes to clarify his position. This is just what Bradley wants to hear. "Only twice in over thirty years. That seems pretty prudent. Could you tell us what was so different that you felt the other abortion

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was necessary?" Bradley is interrupted by an objection from the defense. "It has no relevance to this case." Quick to respond Bradley offers, "To the contrary your honor, shows pattern of action on the doctor's part." Barbara laughs. "I don't see how two of anything makes for a pattern." Barbara points out. Bradley answers, "The many pregnancies where the good Dr. Harrison chose not to do abortions shows a pattern if the two in which he did are so much alike one another yet different from the others." Barkham pauses in thought for a moment then answers the two combatants, "I agree ... objection overruled." The prosecutor resumes his cross, "Again, why did you feel the other abortion was necessary?" Harrison looks at the floor. "My other patient had a similar situation to Ms. Tomlin. Her child was also going to be born severely retarded," Harrison answers. Mumbling and grumblings pass around the courtroom. Crossing the courtroom until he stands beside the jury box Bradley looks the jury members in the eye one by one as he asks Dr. Harrison his next question, "Have any of your other patients asked you to perform abortions?" Almost in a whisper Dr. Harrison answers Bradley, "Yes. Some have." Still staring into the jury foreman's eyes, as if he were questioning her rather than Dr. Kirk Harrison, Bradley proceeds, "According to your testimony you refused them. Can you tell us why you refused the others yet said yes to Ms. Tomlin and this other patient?" In a matter of fact manner the doctor answered, "The others were perfectly normal fetuses." Bradley looks down the jury box and stares at one juror after. "Are you saying that you would never abort a normal fetus? Not even in the first trimester?" Grabbing a hold of the edge of the witness box in an attempt to control his temper Harrison answers him, "Other doctors will and are

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perfectly within their legal rights to do so, but no, I would not." The crafty prosecutor makes light of Harrison's legal opinion, "I promise not to tell you how to deliver a baby if you promise not to tell me the law, doctor." The courtroom is filled with laughter. Barkham slams his gavel down repeatedly until the laughter ends. He glares at Bradley and informs him of the consequences of his action, "That one will cost you \$250.00 Mr. Dalton. Do you wish to try for a thousand?" The prosecutor shakes his head and answers, "No, your honor." Walking over to the prosecution table, stopping and picking up the file Bradley has everyone's attention. He looks at the file for a moment then places it back upon the prosecution table. He faces Harrison. "If you consider it to be legal why would you abort one and not the other?" he asks. "Obviously, the quality of life," the doctor answers. Bradley angrily accuses the doctor, "So now you're god? You decide which lives have value and which do not!" Barbara leaps to her feet yelling, "Objection! Objection!" an icy stare from Barkham which has become a staple of this trial is now fixed upon the prosecutor. "That one will cost you one thousand dollars Mr. Dalton. The next one will cost you some jail time at the end of this trial. Do I make myself clear?" the judge asks Bradley. "Yes sir." Bradley answers. Once more the courtroom is silent as everyone anticipates the next bit of real life drama. "Dr. Harrison is there any personal reason why you might give more value to the life of a normal child versus that of one you suspect may be born retarded?" Bradley asks. The doctor is visibly disturbed by this line of questioning, but feigns ignorance. "I don't understand the question." Bradley smiles. "I think that you do know exactly where I'm going with this Dr. Harrison." Barbara leans over and whispers in

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Anna's ear, "Is there something I need to know about his past?" Anna shrugs her shoulders in ignorance. "My personal life in no way affects my professional decisions," the doctor answers. "Then you do know what I'm getting at ...? Doctor do you have a sister?" Bradley asks. Walsh has no idea where this is going, but she feels that she had better end it, whatever it is. Standing up she objects. "Objection your honor. What can Dr. Harrison having a sister possibly have to do with this case?" she inquires. "Deals directly with the witness' credibility and motive, your honor." Again Barkham pauses to think. "A little leeway Mr. Dalton, but demonstrate your point to this court quickly," he instructs. "Do you have a sister?" the impatient lawyer repeats. "Yes I do." Was Kirk's reply. "Will you tell us where she is right now?" Bradley continues. With head bowed low, as if he has been beaten down, the doctor replies, "Shady Acres." Bradley hammers at the doctor, "Why is your sister at that facility?" Raising his head and glaring at his persecutor Harrison answers, "Because she can't take care of herself!" Unrelentingly came the barrage of questions, "Why doctor? Why can't your sister care for herself?" Tears flow from his eyes as Kirk answers, "She's retarded. Damn it! She's retarded!" Harrison lowers his head. The questioning doesn't end. "How long has she been retarded, doctor?" the prosecutor demands to know. "All of her life." An exhausted Dr. Harrison answers.

Slowly Bradley walks over to the prosecution table. He leans down and picks up a glass of water then drinks. Methodically he places the glass back down and turns to face the doctor once more. "I know that this is painful for you doctor and I don't wish to cause you distress, but I must know ... How old were

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you when your sister was born?" Bradley asks. Remaining in her seat Barbara calls out, "Objection. This line of questioning is definitely irrelevant to the case at hand." Before Bradley can respond Barkham speaks up. "I see where the prosecutor is going and I shall allow him a little more leeway." The questions continue. "Your age?" The doctor pauses for a moment then answers, "I was six." The D.A. goes on, "And how long was it after your sister's birth that your father left the family?" Kirk was both surprised and disappointed that the lawyer knew so much about his personal life. "Less than a year." The whole court sits on pins and needles in anticipation of some new revelation. The doctor could only wonder when this was going to end. "After your father left your mother had to work, didn't she?" the cross continued. Harrison's eyes look empty as he stares at Walsh, hoping for some help to end this personal torture. No help is forthcoming and the life just seems to ebb from his listless eyes. "That's correct," he answers. "If your father was gone and your mother was working who took care of your retarded sister?" Bradley had reached his final destination.

The floodgates burst and all the emotions Harrison had been holding in check came pouring out. "I did! Damn it! I did!" he blubbers. The judge waits for the doctor to compose himself then reprimands him. "Dr. Harrison I understand that this is a very emotional matter for you, but you can not respond like that in my courtroom." The doctor is quick to apologize.

The unrelenting prosecutor continues, "By your reaction Dr. Harrison is it safe to assume that it was quite a hardship for you as a young boy, having

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to care for your retarded sibling?" As Kirk speaks the room is transported back to his childhood. They can see this young boy of six tending to the needs of his sister. Feeding her, taking care of her personal hygiene, being a surrogate parent instead of enjoying the pleasures of his childhood. Turning to face the jury Bradley asks the doctor, "Again I ask you Dr. Harrison are there any personal reasons why you may give a lesser value to the life of a retarded child?" Lowering his head once more Harrison answers, "I hope not. I hope not." Anna turns to Barbara and curses under her breath. Bradley returns to his seat. His cross examination of Dr. Kirk Harrison is over.

Turning to Walsh, Barkham asks, "Would you care to redirect?" Not knowing what else might come up Barbara couldn't wait to get Harrison off of the stand. "No your honor," she answers. The emotionally spent Harrison gets down from the witness box and slowly walks over to Sharon. She looks up at him sympathetically. "I'm sorry," he tells her as one of the deputies directs Kirk to his seat at the defense table.

The hour is late. The combatants are all worn mentally and emotionally from the days revelations. Judge Barkham looks out over the courtroom and views the carnage the day has wrought and decides that there has been enough. "It's late. We will adjourn until 8:00 am tomorrow morning. Wearily both sides drag themselves from the courtroom.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 38
FINDING A MOTHER

One of the deputies has taken Sharon to a holding area in the courthouse. The defendant is being allowed to speak with her lawyer and spend some time with her mother. The mood in the holding area is somber as Bernice and Walsh sit across from the tired young mother-to-be. A deputy sheriff stands at the door observing the three women. Barbara reaches across the table and takes her client's hand in an attempt to comfort her. "It didn't go well today, but don't let that discourage you. Even though the doctor's testimony hurt us it's something we can easily fix," Barbara assures her client. Shaking her head Sharon tells her attorney and mother, "I had no idea about his sister. I thought I knew him. Did he mislead me? Could I be wrong in what I'm doing?" Now Walsh shakes her head. "That's one thing you can't afford. Don't doubt yourself. You must be positive that this is what is best for your child. A jury can be fickle as to the law, but are seldom fickle about their emotions. Remember ... you and your child are the victims in all of this." Walsh reminds Sharon. With strong conviction in her voice Sharon declares, "My child is not going to be a victim of these legal games! I won't let that happen." Squeezing her client's hand in support Barbara tells her, "That's what I want to see tomorrow. Be strong and confident that you are doing the right thing and you and your baby will come out of this winners." Bernice hesitantly speaks up for the first time to her daughter, "I've always envied you your strength." The mother and daughter smile at one another. "I was watching the jury today when you stood up for your daughter. They were impressed with you. We need your continued presence in the courtroom," Walsh tells Bernice. "You don't have to worry. From now on I'll

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will always be there for my daughter." Bernice takes Sharon's hand. "No matter what," she states with a newfound strength of her own. The defense attorney turns to her client. "Unless you have some questions about your testimony tomorrow or about procedural matters I will leave you in your mother's good hands." Looking at her mother lovingly Sharon tells her lawyer that she is ready. The lawyer fills her briefcase with papers which she has then exits the holding area.

One can clearly see that the sheriff's sympathy is with the would-be-mother by the expression he wears when he looks at her, but that doesn't stop him from warning her and Bernice when they lean across the table and embrace. "I'm sorry ladies, but no physical contact is allowed between visitors and prisoners. Only cursory contact such as holding hands." The two women let go of one another. "I didn't know," They echoed one another. "Of course you wouldn't," the guard said, understanding. "The system is really messed up when nice people like you get caught up in the political bullshit. Excuse my French. You ladies buck up. There are a lot of people out there who are in your corner," he adds. The guard then stands silently, as if he were trying to blend in with the wall. Hoping that his silence would somehow grant the mother and daughter some sense of privacy. "Are you alright?" Bernice asks her daughter. How brightly Sharon's smile lights up the room as she looks at her mother, as if for the first time. The daughter asks herself, "Who is this woman that sits across from me? Who is this stranger who is showing me so much love and support?" The grateful woman decides the past is best left in the past. She decides that she will simply be grateful that when she needs her mother most her mother is

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finally here for her. "I'm fine," Sharon answers. "No. Tell me how you are really doing. I want to take some of those burdens from your shoulder if I can," Bernice offers. "I know. And that is why I am fine. You can't begin to know what it meant to me to see you walk through those courtroom doors," she tries to explain to her mother. They lean toward each other then look at the sheriff. "Hell, I don't see anything," he says. The mother and daughter hug. "I probably couldn't have done it if it wasn't for your friend. Now I understand why you love her so much and why I've been so jealous of your relationship with her," Bernice admits. "I do love her. Clarice is my best friend, but she's not my mother. Without you there yesterday was the longest day of my life." The emotions pour from her. "Sweetheart I've spent most of my life being afraid of one thing or another, but even when I was afraid I still loved you. It was that love which finally took away my fears. I can't promise that I won't ever be afraid again, but I can guarantee that my fear will never keep me from you again" Bernice assures her daughter. Taking her mother's hand Sharon says, "That's all I've ever wanted. The sheriff hesitantly interrupts the two women, "I'm sorry ladies, but it's time for you to be transported back to city jail." Standing up Sharon faces the gentle man. "Thank you for your kind words and consideration," she thanks the stranger. "I just wish I could have done more for you," the officer says. He then takes out his handcuffs. Sharon turns around. The officer places the handcuffs on her and leads her away. Tears well up in the mother's eyes as she watches her only child being taken away to prison. The mother follows as closely behind Sharon and the sheriff as she is allowed. They make their way through the courthouse corridors. As they travel

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they bump into Bradley. Daggers of hatred shoot from Bernice's eyes. Bradley seemingly feels the sharp edges pierce his vulnerable heart. "How dare you do this?" Bernice speaks acidly to the prosecutor. "You will never be able to understand the hell that my daughter is going through," she insists. "Ms. Tomlin it is inappropriate for you to be speaking to me," he informs her. The mother laughs. "Inappropriate ... you lawyers have an answer for everything. Don't you?" Bernice turns from Bradley and addresses those passing by in the hallway. "Guess what ... it's inappropriate for a mother to talk to the bastard who's trying to destroy her daughter's life." She then turns to Bradley again. "Tell me ... is it inappropriate for a pompous ass like you to assume that he has the right to Impose his morals upon the rest of us ... the right to judge people, to persecute people," she asks the lawyer. "Since you insist upon going there I'm going to answer you. Yes, it is appropriate for me to do all of the things that you accused me of doing because you and others like you appointed me to do so. I am the law. It's my job to protect your daughter's unborn child from anyone who would do it harm, including its mother. You may say that she's doing what's best for her child. I say she wants to murder her child, pure and simple."

The protective mother isn't buying Bradley's story. "You lawyers can justify anything, but I know the truth. I watch the news. The whole world knows why you're doing this terrible thing. My daughter can't bring back your wife and child. Please show some decency. Don't punish her for your loss." Bernice pleads. "You don't know me and you're a fool if you believe everything the media tells you." Bradley prepares to leave. "I've already said more than I

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should have to you. Good night Ms. Tomlin."

As he walks away Bradley signals to a second sheriff to block Bernice's access to him. The second sheriff moves in between the two adversaries. The first sheriff is leading Sharon out a side door. Sharon smiles back at her mother. Oddly enough this is probably the happiest day of Sharon's life because finally she has found her mother.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 39
A NEW STRATEGY

As Bradley walks out of the courthouse Bernice's words echo through his mind. Carelessly stepping from the curb without looking he is almost hit by a passing car. The driver honks and curses him as the car zooms by the startled attorney. At that moment Cynthia exits the building just in time to see the incident. She runs to him. "Are you alright?" Shaking his head in the affirmative her friend assures her that he is fine. Upset Cynthia slaps the D.A. on his arm. "What the hell are you thinking about that is so damned important that you can't watch where you're going?" she demands. "Nothing. I'm just a little distracted," he lies. "You were almost a little dead." She chastises him. The assistant D.A. and friend takes a motherly posture toward the lost man. "Have you eaten anything today?" she asks. "I was just about to grab myself a sandwich on the way home," again he lies. Taking him by the arm Cynthia leads him down the street.

The two friends find themselves outside a quaint, quiet, little, family restaurant. Wanting only to be alone Bradley is tugging in one direction while his friend is tugging him in the other. Finally he surrenders and allows Cynthia to pull him inside the homey little restaurant. It was his intention at that point to order something small, take a few bites, feign being full thus escaping her parental like protection. When the waiter comes to the table Bradley quickly orders a garden salad. Not to be outfoxed Cynthia tells the waiter to ignore Bradley's order then she orders a full three course meal for each of them. As they wait for their food Cynthia tries talking to Bradley, "No matter what you're going through right now or how bad you treat

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me I'm still you're friend. I know the trial is pulling you in a thousand directions, so lean on me." An upset Bradley asks, "What do you want me to say, Cynthia? That I feel sorry for Sharon Tomlin. I do. No mother should have to make the choice she's faced with for her child. But where do we draw the line? Should any retarded child be aborted. What about a child that may be born blind? What about a child that is going to be born into extreme poverty? And who makes that decision? Does anyone have the right to make that kind of decision for another person? I think that the law supports my beliefs." He takes his friend's hand. "I'm not out for revenge. A small part of me is doing this to make some sense of my loss, but mostly this is about justice for those who can't lobby politicians or cry out in protest for themselves," he states confidently.

All that had needed to be said has been said. The two friends are no longer at odds over why take on this fight. They sit silently and enjoy their meal together. Even though Cynthia sits silent her mind is ever active. Now that she is totally committed to this case she tosses each element of the case around in her head. Then it comes to her and she jumps up elated. "I've got it!" Other patrons in the quiet restaurant stare at her warily. "What is it?" Bradley asks. "I have to go back to the office and check on some things, but I think I know how to counter the sympathy the mother-to-be may solicit from the jury," she says confidently.

Hours later Cynthia has finished her research and finds herself at the warden's office of the Baltimore City jail. "I need to look through prisoner's records for I.Q. test scores then I would

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like to cross reference those with criminal records and whatever you may have in the way of psych profiles. The warden is curious, but doesn't want to make any work for himself so he assigns a clerk to help the assistant D.A. with her research. She thanks him as he makes a hasty retreat from his office.

A short time later a disgruntled Lt. White enters the warden's office. The two of them sit down at the computer and begin. Jackie Jackson, the name shows boldly upon the computer's screen. The assistant D.A. shakes her head as she reviews the continuous streak of petty crimes committed by this obviously brilliant man. His IQ is 185, yet he has chosen to dedicate his life to a career of none spectacular criminal activity. Funny, the attitudes we have about respect ... Cynthia thought that she would have respected the man more if his crimes had been more creative or offered larger paydays. It was as if he were trying to live down to some street hoodlum image he or others had created for him. He didn't deserve it, but she was going to give this woeful piece of humanity a chance to do something of value with his life at long last.

Lt. White is instructed to bring Jackie to the warden's office to be interviewed by Cynthia. The door to the warden's office opens and in walks this hip-hop, streetwise, forty year old, wanna-be gang-banger. Pointing to a chair Cynthia instructs Jackie to have a seat. He looks the assistant D.A. up and down suspiciously. Finally smiling he takes a seat. "What can I do for you lady?" trying to maintain a persona of cool. "Do you know who I am?" Cynthia asks with an icy edge to her tone. "Nope, but you'll tell me when you think I need to know," he still

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wants to sound street cool. My name is Cynthia Blaylock. I'm the assistant D.A. and I need your help with a case I'm working on." Suddenly Jackie remembers her. "Oh yeah ... I remember you now. I saw you on TV earlier. You are on that abortion case." Jackie smiles knowingly. This could be his ticket to early parole. "How can I help?"

After spending the night working out a deal with Jackie the assistant D.A. feels as though she needs a shower to wash this slimy game called the law from her skin. As the waters spray gently down upon her body she starts to feel clean once more.

The doorbell rings. A creepy feeling comes over her again because she knows that it's Lamp at the door. Before she left the prison she called him and asked him to stop by her home. For her plan to work she needed him to find someone else for her. As she climbs out of the shower and dries off she knows that she will be in need of another shower after round two of this morally questionable plan she has to put into action. With a towel wrapped around her still wet hair and wearing nothing else except her slippers and a robe she opens the door. The wishful thinking Lamp smiles mischievously. For Cynthia letting him see her like this then sending him on his errand was the perfect revenge for his indiscretion. The plan was laid out by Cynthia while she crosses and uncrosses her legs again and again.

Her intent is to torture poor Lamp. The teasing is hard on Lamp, but it is nothing compared to the moral concerns that he has started to have about his job. It seems that the end is always thought to justify any means. This is it for him. Compromise

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can't be a way of life for him. In his heart he hopes that this will all work out and children's lives will be saved by their new strategy, but after this trial is over he is going to find another line of work.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 40
DOUBTS

It is 8:10 am. Sharon Tomlin sits in the witness box. At the prosecution table Bradley is going over his notes. Across the room Anna and Barbara are having a last minute one on one. Walsh gets up and walks over to the witness box, stops then stares at her client reassuringly. Confidently Sharon smiles as the defense attorney proceeds. "Ms. Tomlin did you know that Dr. Harrison had a retarded sister?" Lovingly Sharon looks at the man who has been the closest thing to a father she has ever known. "No I didn't, but it wouldn't have made any difference. I use to work for Dr. Harrison. He is like a father to me. Even more than that, I trust him as a person and as a doctor. Mr. Bradley may have managed to confuse him, but he hasn't confused me about who Dr. Harrison is. He's a man of integrity." It is time to test Sharon's resolve. "Why do you want to have an abortion?" Walsh asks. "No one wants to have an abortion, but what choice do I have? Should I spend the rest of my life watching my child suffer, detached, unfeeling, beyond the reach of all of life's wonders? And what about after I'm gone? Who will care for him then? What if it was your child?" Sharon turns to the jury. "... or your child?" Barkham reprimands Sharon, "Do not address the jury Ms. Tomlin."

Turning Walsh heads for the defense table. "No further questions." The defense attorney announces as she takes her seat. Anna smiles. "She did well," Anna notes. Everyone in the courtroom have their eyes glued upon Bradley as he makes his way to the jury box. The skilled lawyer looks around the court, making eye contact with every spectator, juror, the sheriffs, the bailiff and the judge. His eyes stop

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when they meet Sharon's eyes. "Unconditional love ..." when Bradley speaks those words Sharon is visibly upset. Almost as if someone has just touched her with a branding iron. "You have to excuse me Ms. Tomlin. I wasn't eavesdropping. I couldn't help but hear you speaking with your mother during a recess yesterday. Am I right in thinking that you love your unborn child unconditionally?" he asks. "Of course I do," she doesn't hesitate to answer. "Then maybe you can understand my confusion. Why are we here?" A perplexed Bradley asks. "Because I don't want to see my child suffer," Sharon answers. "Again I'm confused. Didn't Dr. Harrison say that the child would not be able to understand anything, so how can it suffer? Can you be sure that all this child may need to be fulfilled is someone to love it unconditionally?" Bradley batters the mother-to-be with questions. "You're trying to confuse me." Sharon admits. Bradley shakes his head vehemently. "Maybe it isn't me who has you confused. Maybe Dr. Harrison has you confused."

"Did you ever wonder if his diagnosis might be wrong? Did you ever seek a second opinion? Doesn't your child deserve at least that much?" he continues his barrage. "I trust him," is Sharon's feeble reply. Bradley walks toward the jury box. "Maybe you trust him too much." Walsh interrupts "Objection your honor." Bradley offers a weak apology and moves on. "Do you still trust him?" Sharon looks at Kirk and smiles. "Yes I do." Kirk smiles back at her. An agitated Bradley shakes his head in disbelief. "Let me get this straight, even though Dr. Harrison has stated under oath that he isn't sure that he didn't let his personal feelings influence his professional judgment you are still so trusting that you would take your child's life?" Walsh jumps to her feet, but

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but not before Sharon has answered, "I don't know! I just don't know what's right anymore!" she cries. Walsh faces Barkham. "Could we have a brief recess your honor. My client is a pregnant woman who has endured an arduous morning," she reminds Barkham. The judge turns to the distraught mother-to-be and asks, "Do you need time to compose yourself Ms. Tomlin?" Still weeping Sharon nods her head yes. Sympathetic he calls for a thirty minute recess.

Taking her client to the holding area Barbara is obviously annoyed. Once there she confronts her client. "You are just laying down in the grave and pulling the dirt down over yourself. Last night you told me that you were positive that you were doing the right thing for you and your child. Don't let Dalton confuse you." A rattled Sharon asks her attorney, "What if he's right?" How can anyone ever be a hundred percent sure about taking their child's life?"

Patiently Barbara tries to explain the facts of her situation to Sharon, "If there's a chance that you don't want to have this abortion, that you are having any doubts, you had better not relay that to the jury. If you do they can easily be swayed by Mr. Dalton's arguments. This means both you and Dr. Harrison could end up going to jail." Visibly upset Sharon asks, "How could they do that? We haven't done anything wrong." Her client still doesn't get it. "You need to convince the jury that you believe in what you're doing." Walsh warns her. "I'll try," Sharon all so meekly replies. Anna walks in on the end of the conversation. "You had better do more than try," Walsh adds sternly. "It's time to go back," Anna instructs them.

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Once back in the courtroom the D.A. stands a few feet in front of Sharon who sits again in the witness box. "What would you have done if your child was born healthy then an accident had rendered them unable to care for themselves?" Instantly Walsh springs to her feet. "Objection! Calls for speculation on the part of the witness." Barkham sustains the objection. "Mr. Dalton this trial is going to proceed quickly despite your efforts to the contrary. I know this because if you insist upon delaying things with obviously objectionable questions and other tactics you are going to find yourself behind bars and your assistant shall have to proceed in your place," the judge warns. "No further questions at this time." Bradley concedes. "That's probably a wise decision." The judge notes. Slowly Bradley walks back to the prosecution table and takes his seat. "Would you care to redirect, Ms. Walsh?" Barkham asks.

The defense attorney starts right in, "Did you or Dr. Harrison ever discuss the possibility of aborting this pregnancy after the first trimester?" An agitated Sharon screams her answer, "No! Not ever!" Barbara sits back down. "No further questions." She concludes with her client. Sharon's testimony had wavered back and forth from weak to strong, but in the end she displays little doubt that she believes that she is doing what is best for her child. This leaves Bradley's case in doubt.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 41
CHIMES

The investigator for the D.A.'s office sits at the cafeteria table at the Chimes organization with the very attractive administrator, Veronica Handle. Miss Handle is having a cup of coffee while Lamp is eating a hearty lunch of salad, sandwich and desert. The administrator has a disarming smile and Lamp is falling victim to her charms. "Mr. Lamp, you've told me that you work for the D.A.'s office and that you're assisting him with that big abortion case, but for the world of me I can't begin to guess what kind of help we might be to you." Handle wonders aloud. "The reason this woman is having an abortion and the reason this doctor feels comfortable doing this procedure is that they believe that a child born retarded can't have a full and happy life. An angry Veronica interrupts, "That's ridiculous!" Lamp smiles. "The D.A. also believes it's ridiculous ... I feel the same," Lamp assures her. "So you want me to testify as an expert witness?" she asks. "Not exactly ..." Lamp begins explaining what the assistant D.A. has in mind. Though Veronica has some reservations she agrees to help with Cynthia's plan.

It is a painstaking job, searching through Veronica's files for the ideal candidate to work with the D.A.'s office on this very sensitive matter. They know that personality and confidence are going to be important factors in the selection process, but equally important is going to be family support for this. Very often the families are reticent about public displays because these individuals have spent so much of their lives being ridiculed because they are different. There he is, Tommy Hart. Veronica wonders why he hadn't immediately come to mind. He has a smile so big it

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could light up Madison Square Garden and personality to charm the birds from the trees. His family are devout Catholics. They are proud of all Tommy has accomplished in his life. The Chimes director is very confident that they will be sympathetic to this cause.

A smiling Tommy sits across from Miss Handle and Lamp in her office. "You wanned ta see me Miss Hanle?" Tommy asks in his broken English. Smiling at her favorite charge Veronica begins to explain to Tommy what Mr. Lamp wants. At first Tommy frowns over the prospect that a mother could want to hurt her own child because the child was like him, but as it is explained to him that Ms. Handle wants him to help the mother to understand so that she will change her mind. He becomes enthusiastic. "Yes! Miss Hanle ... I wanna do dis," he assures her. "Mr. Lamp and I are going to talk with your family about this and if they say yes then you are going to court," she confirms.

There is always lots of family around the Hart household. Today is no exception. Tommy's mother, Dolly, is preparing a grand feast in the kitchen. One of Tommy's sisters is helping her. William Hart, the father, sits in front of the TV watching a college football game and puffing on a large cigar. Sitting there with their faces scrunched up, but pretending not to be bother by the smoke is Lamp and Veronica. Spotting their discomfort he asks, "Is the smoke bothering you?" Trying to be understanding Lamp lies, "Noooo." Veronica has no such inclination. "Now that you've asked ... yes it does," she admits. Grumbling under his breath the father snuffs out his cigar and leans back in his chair. It isn't long before Tommy enters carrying a

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bottle of wine and two glasses for their guests. "My modder told me to bring you dis." He places the glasses down upon coasters on the table then hands the bottle of wine to Lamp. They thank Tommy. Lamp pours them each a glass of wine then turns to Mr. Hart. "Are you going to join us?" Their host tells them that he generally has his wine with or after dinner. They nod then drink their wine while they wait patiently for the opportunity to finish their discussion with the Hart family.

Dinner is served. The investigator has to admit that this is one of the most delicious meals he has ever eaten. "Mmmmm", he hums more than satisfied as he bites into the chicken Mrs. Hart has prepared. Dolly and Tommy's sister can't help but laugh as Lamp eats ravenously. "I think someone likes your chicken," William jokes. Everyone joins in on laughing at Lamp. "It's delicious." Lamp excuses, still with a mouthful of food. "I'm glad you like the food Mr. Lamp and don't you pay them any mind. They love to tease one another, but they will draft anyone they can get." Dolly explains. Despite the teasing Lamp nor anyone else is eating lightly of this feast. Dolly's homemade bread is to die for, the mash potatoes are smooth and smothered in gravy and onions. The string beans, the cherry pie, every bite makes one long for the old days when a meal like this was a part of the American tapestry, rather than fast food joints.

The jovial company and the incredible food cannot take Veronica's mind off of the very serious purpose for them being here. All too soon for most the meal is over, the table is cleared and they all return to the living room to talk. The jolly mood of dinner has turned somber as each wait for the other to dare

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broach the subject. It is William who speaks first, "This is a lot to ask of my son." Lamp stares straight into Mr. Hart's eyes and nods his head in agreement. "I know it is sir and I wouldn't blame you if you said no. If it was my son I don't know what I would say, but if someone doesn't help the children may never be protected," Lamp warns. The father turns to his son. "Do you really understand what you will be getting yourself into son?" Tommy nods. "Yes sir. Mr. Lamp said dat lawyer may try to make me look stupid and say mean things to me, but if I can help da lady and her baby and I don't do dis ... wouldn't dat be wong?" Tommy asks. His mother walks over to him and hugs him. "Yes it would be wrong. And don't you worry about being afraid ... we'll be in court rooting you on. Remember this Tommy ... she's not a bad lady she just doesn't understand that she's doing a bad thing. Make her understand, baby," Dolly affectionately instructs her son. She runs her fingers through his hair. Tommy shakes his head. "Don't call me baby, mom. I'm a man," he whines. His mother showers his face with kisses while he tries to fend her off. Everyone else laughs. "You will always be my baby, just like all of your brothers and sisters. That's a mother's prerogative." she explains. "A prenoga what?" Tommy asks, puzzled. They all laugh.

Lamp and Veronica have accomplished their mission. Even so or maybe because of their success the car ride taking Lamp home is in a suffocating silence. As Veronica's car pulls up in front of Lamp's apartment she turns his way and says, "I hope that I'm not going to regret this." Lamp leans over and kisses Veronica on the cheek then says to her, "Miss Handle we are swimming in the same murky waters. All we can do is follow the current and pray

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that it brings us to the right destination."

After Lamp exits the car Veronica hastily pulls away. He makes his way upstairs to his apartment. Once inside he looks around. For the first time ever his home seems all too empty. He wonders what it would have been like if he had chosen to get married and have children. Would it have been like the Hart's home, brimming with love and fulfillment? Even Tommy seems to have something in his life which Lamp has failed to capture.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 42
HOW LOW DO WE GO

A policeman accompanies Cynthia to the jail to pick up Jackie. "Hey pretty lady. Back to see old Jackie again already? When I'm back on the street we'll have to get together," he flirts with Cynthia. "Look you little arrogant twit, don't play with me or you'll find yourself back in a cell and I'll find myself another loser to take your place," she lets him know who is in charge. "Calm down Miss Lady. Jackie was just trying to lighten an awkward situation with a little levity. Don't hate me because I'm entertaining," he laughs nervously. Cynthia turns to the officer. "Cuff him and let's get out of here." The officer follows her instructions. The three of them hurry to exit the prison grounds.

Back at the D.A.'s office, Bradley awaits Cynthia's return. The door opens and Lamp enters. "I figured you might still be here." Lamp says as he closes the door behind himself. "What brings you here this time of night." Bradley asks. "Couldn't sleep. I decided I wanted some company and you drew the short straw." The two men laugh. Usually Lamp walks with his head high and his shoulders straight back, but tonight both are slumped, as if he were carrying some awesome burden. In the truest sense he is. He sits down opposite of Bradley. Having known Lamp for a time now Bradley knows there are only two ways to cheer him up, women or food. Since he isn't about to start pandering for the man he offers to treat him to some carry out. Though Lamp had made a glutton of himself at the Harts it doesn't stop him from going again. "Chinese sounds good," he says to Bradley's offer. After Bradley has called and ordered the food the two men sit and talk. "Why did you really stop

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by tonight," Bradley wonders. A heavy sigh escapes Lamp. He begins talking about his day. "I met this man, Tommy Hart. He's a great guy and I can't help but wonder how he's going to fare in all of this. What will happen to him after the reporters and cameras are all gone? If we lose is it worth the risk to turn his life upside down? I've got a thousand questions and no answers. That's why I'm here." His friend looks the troubled man in the eyes and states confidently, "We aren't going to lose. Besides that I would bet that two weeks after the trial is over your Tommy Hart probably won't even remember your name."

The door to the office opens once again. This time it is Cynthia who enters followed by Jackie and the policeman. Cynthia asks the officer to wait outside the office for them. Annoyed over her request he leaves, closing the door after himself. As Jackie and Cynthia take their seats there comes a knock at the door. It's the delivery guy bringing Bradley and Lamp's food. He places the food on Bradley's desk. The D.A. pays the man and the delivery guy leaves. Noting that once again Lamp doesn't offer to pay Bradley needles him. "You could have at least pretended to reach for your wallet." Lamp disagrees. "After all of the overtime you've had me doing Chinese is the least you could have done." The D.A. reminds Lamp, "Have you forgotten that this office picked up the tab for dinner for two at Claire de Lunne for you?" The investigator was signaling his boss to keep that under his hat, but it was too late. Cynthia glares at him with utter contempt.

Turning his attention back to the task at hand Bradley turns to Jackie. "Mr. Jackson ..." The career criminal interrupts Bradley, "Mr. Jackson ...

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I like the sound of that." An annoyed Bradley instructs his witness, "Shut up and pay close attention to what I have to say!" Silently the prisoner listens. "Do you understand what it is that we want from you?" Bradley asks. The oh so fast talking con begins his spiel, "Yes sir. I really believe in what you people are trying to do. That's why I'm here Mr. Dalton," then he pauses. "I hate to bring this up at a time like this, but Ms. Blaylock said something about you putting in a good word for me with the parole board. How strong a word will that be?" he slyly smiles. Bradley plays along with Jackie's game and plays one of his own. "I know that you want to help Jackie. And to answer your question ... if you don't let me down I won't let you down," the D.A. both warns and promises. "You can count on me," Jackie assures him. "Count on you to look out for yourself," Lamp adds. "Don't be a player hater," Jackie tells Lamp. "You ain't no player. You're just a low life thug," Lamp admonishes the convict. Putting on his hardest jailhouse mug Jackie turns to Lamp. "I don't know who you are, but you people know what you're buying in me, so if I wasn't what you needed I would still be back in my cell with no chance of help from you, so don't get high and mighty with me. I'm not the one." It is Bradley who tries to quiet the antagonism. "That's right Jackie. You are exactly what we need." The prosecutor stands up, walks to the door and beckons the policeman in. "You can take him back now." The officer turns Jackie's back to him and places the cuffs on his prisoner. Smiling as usual Jackie faces Cynthia. "Are you going to escort me back?" he kids the assistant D.A. "I don't think so. I wouldn't want to make one of your jailhouse boyfriends jealous," she returns his kidding. "You wouldn't know what to do with a man like me anyway," Jackie strikes back."Yes

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"Yes I do. Let me show you." Cynthia turns to the policeman. "Officer take him back to jail." Everyone except Jackie laughs as the officer takes him away. Jackie hollers back to Bradley, "I'm your man, Mr. D. I'm your man." The door closes behind the two men.

The D.A. staff looks around the room at one another, each wondering what no one wanted to say, "How low do we go to win this case?" In the end Bradley knows that decision will be his.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 43
EXAMINING THE MEANS

In the eerie loneliness of this night Lamp sits watching a late night movie show. A bowl of popcorn and a beer sit on the table beside him. An old James Cagney movie is showing. In this particular movie Cagney plays a gangster idolized by the local kids for his ruthlessness. The neighborhood priest talks him into pretending to plead for his life in order to destroy his carefully crafted image of cold steel. The moral, even a heartless killer will make sacrifices to save the children. Lamp watches another movie and another until the morning sun breaks through his living room window. It is only 6:00 am but he has too much nervous energy. Grabbing his coat Lamp heads downtown to the courthouse. His plan is to eat while he waits for today's fireworks to begin.

Across town there has been no sleeping for Bradley or Cynthia either. Along with his morning coffee Bradley sits reading over some of Cynthia's notes on her new strategy. Meanwhile she is in his kitchen preparing breakfast for the two of them. The door to the kitchen opens and Bradley looks up from the paperwork. His friend is carrying a tray of food. There is French toast, slices of glazed ham, cheese omelets, jam and orange juice for both of them.

After they have eaten Cynthia clears away the mess. They still have about an hour before they have to leave for court. Cynthia returns carrying two glasses of wine. They sit down and sip of their drinks. The enamored woman leans over and kisses Bradley upon his lips. He pulls away. "I don't think that this is a good idea," he warns. "No strings." Cynthia assures him. I want to be with you and I

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believe that you want to be with me," she says as she leans over and kisses him once more. There is no denying that Bradley needs to feel a woman in his arms again. The sweet taste of a woman's mouth, the texture of her breasts in his hands, the feeling of being as one with another human being, as one can only feel during the act of making love. Her tongue caresses his lips tenderly. Her hands tug his shirttail from his pants. His hands begin to explore her body through her thin veil of clothing. The more they touch the higher the flames blaze in their loins. He hears his zipper being undone then feels the once familiar touch of a woman's caress as she gently strokes him. A moan escapes his lips. The deprived man can wait no longer. Urgently he pushes her back onto the sofa. One of her legs is on the floor, the other is draped over the same couch. Like two animals consumed by passion the two slam their bodies against one another. It isn't long before they are climbing toward the pinnacle of fulfillment. His hands reach under her, lifting her hips upward, closer to him and him deeper into her. Screams and moans of ecstasy wail from their lips. Their bodies tremble, hearts pound and their needs are temporarily satiated.

Afterward Bradley peers into Cynthia's eyes and he sees tears. They are tears of completion, of joy, maybe of love. Bradley mistakes them for tears of regret, for something lost. He can't help but wonder if he has selfishly ignored the feelings of his friend for what he needed ... so badly to connect to someone again. Getting up and heading toward the bathroom his thoughts are, "I can't examine this ... at least not right now." Maybe if he had stopped to examine those actions or to exam other of his actions since his wife and child had died maybe some

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of the tragedies that transpired could have been averted. Maybe not. Maybe the tracks of fate are laid out before us from the start and there is no other route we can travel.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 44
UNDERSTANDING THE GAME

Everyone has a sense that today is the day that things will come to a head in this trial. Like some granite statue Bradley stands at the front of the court room ready to call his first witness. The lawyers for the defense and the defendants sit unaware of the juggernaut which is about to roll over them. "Mr. Jackie Jackson." Bradley calls his first surprise witness. Totally befuddled Anna and Barbara look through their notes. Unable to find any reference to this witness Walsh jumps to her feet and yells, "Objection your honor. We have no previous knowledge of this witness." An expression of exasperation shows on Barkham's face. Ms. Walsh, Mr. Dalton ... side bar." the judge instructs the two attorneys. They walk up near the bench and stand a few feet away. "What's going on Mr. Dalton?" Barkham questions, suspicious. "This witness and one other, a Mr. Tommy Hart, are witnesses that we called to answer issues the defense's witnesses have brought up in their testimony." The judge looks at Walsh. "If this is true you opened the door for this Ms. Walsh. I'm going to allow it, but if you are lying to me Mr. Dalton I promise you that you will regret it," he threatens the lawyer. Barbara returns to the defense table. She shrugs her shoulders in resignation.

Stepping away from the bench Bradley returns his attention to the court. "Mr. Jackie Jackson to the stand." The courtroom doors open and Jackie enters. He is dressed as a gang banger and swaggers in that special hoodlum limp which is supposed to signify being cool. Stopping at the prosecution table he gives Cynthia a wink. The assistant district attorney shakes her head disapprovingly. The street

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hood continues on. Angry, Walsh stands up and announces to the court, "I want it on the record that I object to this witness and the witness yet to come, a Mr. Tommy Hart, on the grounds that the defense received no prior notice," Barkham signals for Walsh to have a seat. "I ruled on the matter at the side bar Ms. Walsh, but your objection will be duly noted for the record." Bradley walks over to the witness, Jackie, then stops. "For the record, what is your name?" Meaning to appear a smart ass Jackie looks defiantly at the judge as he answers. "My mother named me Jackie Bartholemew Jackson, but on the streets I'm known as Cool Breeze. Barkham frowns at the immature older man. "Cool Breeze . . .," Bradley mocks his witness. Would you tell this court what your IQ is." Wearing a "Cheshire Cat" grin Jackie answers, "They tell me it's 185, but given that those test are racially bias I would say it's more likely a lot higher." Walking closer to Jackie the attorney asks, "What does that mean to you?" Still trying to maintain that street guy image Jackie answers coolly, "Don't mean nuttin."

Bradley crosses the room and stands in front of the juror's box. "That's odd, because to me it means that you're a pretty smart guy," troubled by the fact that she has no idea where this is all going Walsh objects again. "Your honor, what does this man's IQ have to do with this case? No! What does this man have to do with this case?" Walsh finally demands. Staring at Bradley the puzzled Barkham questions, "Where are you going with this Mr. Dalton?" The sly attorney now has the opening he has been waiting for . . . Dr. Harrison and Ms. Tomlin have equated the quality of the child's life with his mental capacity. This witness and the witness to follow shall demonstrate to the court that no such

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correlation can be made." Barkham hesitates for a moment and then says, "Proceed." Walsh sits down and sighs in exasperation. "Do I need to tell you to tread softly Mr. Dalton?" Barkham menacingly states. Not answering the judge Bradley continues. "Are you a smart guy Mr. Jackson?" the astute lawyer asks. "A lot smarter than you Mr. Dalton." Jackie snidely replies. "I don't doubt that." Bradley acknowledges. "Where are you living at the moment?" he continues. A lot less cocky is Jackie's next reply. "Baltimore City Jail." Jackie bows his head as the questioning continues, "How long have you lived there?" Not wanting to appear a total loser Jackie limits his answer. "Two years, this time." Bradley can see that Barkham is losing his patience so he decides to wrap this up. "How old are you?" Relieved over the change of direction Jackie answers, "Forty, though I don't look it." This was the defining moment. "And how many years of the forty years of your life have you spent incarcerated?" Embarrassed he answers softly, "Twenty four." To clarify his point for all the prosecutor asks a last series of questions of Jackie, "You have no medical problems, a genius IQ, yet you have spent twenty four of your forty years in jail, correct?" Honestly humbled the genius petty convict bows his head and answers, "I guess so ... yes."

As Bradley sits down Barkham turns to Barbara. "Do you wish to cross examine this witness Ms. Walsh?" She stands up and walks menacingly toward Jackie. "Oh yes. I very much want to question this witness." Stopping in front of the witness box she looks at Jackie and shakes her head. "You are some piece of work," Barbara begins. Barkham slams down his gavel. "That remark will cost you \$250.00 Ms. Walsh. In this courtroom you will treat each and everyone of

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the witnesses with respect regardless of your personal opinion of them. Understood?" Meekly she answers, "Yes, your honor." Not wanting the jury to lose that she thinks little of this man she rushes into her questioning. "Cool Breeze. A genius IQ. Yet you've spent most of your life in and out of jails. That doesn't say smart to me, but then again Mr. Dalton and I differ in our interpretations of a lot of things. There is one thing I am willing to bet that you've learned ... jailhouse games. I would bet that you wouldn't let any prosecutor use you unless you get something in return, Cool Breeze." Jackie plays the part of the righteous crusader. "I'm here because I want to help save the lives of all of those children. Even a criminal has a heart." The convict notes. Barbara laughs. "Purely altruistic? The D.A. didn't offer you anything in return for your testimony here today?" the defense attorney asks. "Sure he offered me something, but that's not the only reason that I'm testifying," he answers. "With heavy sarcasm Barbara mocks Jackie. "Oh yeah. I almost forgot. You want to help save the children. What was it you said ...? ... criminals have hearts too." Much like a stern father Barkham doles out his punishment to Walsh. "That one will cost you one thousand dollars Ms. Walsh." The defense attorney stops her laughter. "What did the prosecution offer you Mr. Jackson?" Looking over at Bradley he answers, "Mr. Dalton said that he would speak to the parole board on my behalf." Marching back and forth in front of the witness Barbara continues her cross examination, "Mr. Dalton is willing to help a petty career criminal get out of jail early, so that he can prosecute a mother who only wants what's best for her unborn child?" The crafty Jackie jumps on this opportunity to ingratiate himself with the prosecution. "How many times as a defense attorney

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have you asked Mr. Dalton or some other prosecutor to do the same thing for one of your clients? I bounce checks. Run small time cons, but never have I hurt anyone. Your client wants to kill her own child. I guess to Mr. Dalton she's the dangerous one." Walsh quickly answers Jackie's accusations, "No! Mr. Jackson. My client wants to save her child from a life of emptiness while you want to run a small time con on this court." Barbara turns and walks away. Barkham asks Bradley if he wishes to redirect. He declines.

"Court is adjourned until one o'clock this afternoon." The gavel slamming down marks the end of the morning session. A deputy comes up behind Jackie and places handcuffs on him. As he is being escorted out of the court he turns to Cynthia and flirts once more, "I should be out in two weeks. Keep a day open on your calendar to experience a real man." Laughing Cynthia answers, "Why do I have to wait. Give me his name and number and I'll call him after I get off tonight." It is Jackie who laughs now. "You're alright Miss D.A.. In fact you are almost as cool as Cool Breeze himself. Almost." The deputy takes Jackie's arm and leads him away.

Marching over to the prosecution table Walsh appears as angry as a shaken hornet's nest. "These theatrics of yours won't color the law. You're going to lose and my client is going to exercise her right to choose," she promises. "If I were you I wouldn't raise that banner so proudly. All you're doing is advocating the right to kill." Barbara raises her hand to strike Bradley. Cynthia grabs Barbara's hand. "You've said your piece. Now why don't we all get back to our jobs," Cynthia instructs Walsh. Barbara glares at Cynthia. "Is that all this means

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to you ... a job?" the defense attorney questions. "Isn't that enough? We are the best and last sentinels of democracy and the law is our swords." A smile of sarcasm shows on Barbara. She gives Cynthia an ovation. "You're almost as good as your boss." Barbara notes cynically then turns and walks away.

A short time later the prosecution team sits around the lunch room table when Lamp enters. He walks over to the table and joins Cynthia and Bradley. The investigator had missed the morning session of court. At breakfast he met a woman, who just might be "The One." Cynthia is talking to Bradley about her impressions of the session. "I wish that Jackie could have come across more likable instead of as a flim-flam man." Grabbing a waitress by the hand Lamp orders then sits down. "How did things go?" Lamp asks. The two colleagues answer simultaneously, "Great," Bradley answers. "Terrible" Cynthia answers. A puzzled Lamp looks from one lawyer to the other. "Which was it?" he asks of both of them. Cynthia stares at Bradley puzzled. "It seems that Mr. Jackson understood his role better than the one who came up with the plan." Frowning Cynthia answers, "They hated him." Bradley laughs. "They are supposed to hate him. His job is to make the jurors want Tommy and not this arrogant genius for a son." Smiling Cynthia asks, "How could I have been so stupid. Of course you're right." Bradley jokes, "You're not stupid. You're just not as smart as me or Mr. Jackson." They all laugh.

Sometimes the law is a less than noble profession. It can become an ugly game where the winner is the person who best understands the ugliness of it and is willing to play it to the hilt.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 45
LOVING TOMMY

There are people that you will meet in your life time that you will never forget. Most of these people are so abrasive that you wish that you could forget them, but this gentle giant of a man who walks down the aisle of the courtroom makes everyone richer for having known him. His walk is awkward. His dress borders on the ridiculous. Just to look at him one knows instantly that he is not the brightest bulb in the package. As is the way with some people because he is different one fool tries to hurt him. "He's an idiot!" a spectator yells out. A deputy is quick to drag the true idiot from the courtroom.

One may have thought that would unnerve Tommy, but no ... he has become accustomed to such cruelties and has learned that he has two options, let them hurt him or try to teach the other person better with kindness. Smiling Tommy takes his seat in the witness box. Knowing that this is trouble Walsh tries a different tactic to disallow Tommy from testifying. "I object to this witness on the grounds of his competency to testify, your honor," having anticipated this Bradley stands. "I have an expert witness in the court who can attest to Mr. Hart's competency as a witness." Veronica stands up. Barkham signals for her to be seated. "I don't think that will be necessary Mr. Dalton." The judge turns to Tommy. "Mr. Hart, do you understand what is going on here?" Barkahm asks. Tommy points to Bradley and Sharon. "That man wants to send that lady to jail because she wants to kill her baby. "The judge smiles down at Tommy. "Do you understand that when you answer you must always tell the truth in court?" Tommy nods his head. "I would never tell a lie. Lying is bad. I don't ever want to be bad." Barkham

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is satisfied. He turns to Bradley and instructs him to proceed.

William Hart stands up and cheers his son. "Give 'em hell Tommy!" A deputy heads toward William. Bradley waves the deputy off. Glaring at the disruptive stranger Barkam questions Bradley, "Who is this person, Mr. Dalton?" Apologetic, the lawyer explains to the judge, "This is William Hart, Tommy Hart's father. He got a little carried away. I promise it won't happen again." In a last ditch effort to derail Bradley's strategy Walsh objects. "Your honor this is extremely prejudicial to my client's case." Bradley interrupts. "It was Ms. Walsh who raised the issue of quality of life, your honor." The judge nods in agreement. "You can't have it both ways Ms. Walsh. Proceed Mr. Dalton."

As Barbara sits down Bradley makes his way to the witness box. "For the record ... what is your name?" the prosecutor asks. "Tometh Hart, but erwyone calls me Tommy," he answers wearing his huge winning smile. "Why are you here today Tommy?" Bradley asks. "Dat lady wants to kill her baby jus cause him gonna be tarded and she thinks he can't be happy. Mr. Lamp asked me if I was happy. I told him yes, so he asked me if I would tell da lady, so dat she might change her mind and let her baby be happy too." The quiet of the courtroom is shattered when Sharon breaks down and begins to weep. The empathetic Tommy looks over to Sharon. "Lady please don't cry," He pleads. Tommy turns to judge Barkham. "I didn't mean to make her cry. I just want to help." Walsh leans over and comforts her client. "Are you alright Ms. Tomlin?" Barkham asks, concerned. "I'll be fine," Sharon answers. The skilled prosecutor continues on with his questioning. "How old are you Tommy?" Wearing a

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big grin on his face Tommy says, "I jus had a birtday. I'm 40 years old. I had ice cream and cake. My friends came over. My girlfriend Yvonne came too." Even Bradley is touched by this loving soul. "I bet you all had a great time," Bradley adds. The D.A. wants the jury to understand just how different Tommy and Jackie are. He continues his cross examination. "Do you have a place of your own?" The proud young man confidently answers, "Yes sir. My mom didn't want me to at first. She was afeared for me, but after a while she was still scared, but she was proud too." Tommy's mother gave him the okay sign from her seat in the courtroom. "Do you work Tommy?" Beaming with pride he announces, "You bet I do! My dad says a man without a job is no man at all. I'm a real man." Everyone in the courtroom is mesmerized by Tommy's charismatic personality. "Have you ever been in trouble Tommy?" Bradley asks. "When I was little my mom told me dat I couldn't have any cookies, but when she left out I took some anyway. She hollered at me so bad ... I never done dat again," he told Bradley. His innocence is a delight. A crooked smile creases Bradley's lips. "No. I mean with the police, Tommy." Disturbed by the question Tommy shakes his head vigorously. "No! Only bad people get in trouble wid da police. My mom wouldn't like it if I were bad." Taking a chance Bradley asks a question with no idea what Tommy's answer might be. "Is that the only reason why you wouldn't be bad?" The chance is rewarded. "My mom said that when a person is bad they hurt people. I never want to hurt anyone. Like when I walked in here today someone said mean things and it hurt. I never want to make anyone feel like dat," Tommy finishes. The D.A. walks away.

As Bradley walks to his seat he can see William Hart

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The man sits there looking as proud as a man had a right to be. Bradley knew then more than ever before that he was doing the right thing. An agitated Walsh fumbles through her notes. "Would you care to question this witness Ms. Walsh?" Barkham asks. Being a lawyer is sometimes much like a tightrope walker. If she attacks this amiable man it could create a backlash of resentment which could hurt her case, but she must discredit his testimony. "Your friends that attended the party ... how many of them came with their parents?" Walsh asks. "Only Suzy." Tommy answers. The attorney had made assumptions based on how she believed challenged people lived their lives, so she was quick to assume that Tommy was lying. "Would you have this court believe that out of all of your challenged friends only Suzy lives at home?" she asks accusingly. Tommy laughs. "All of my friends not tarded. Suzy not tarded, but she the only one who wanna live with her parents. Her car broke down." Flustered Barbara dives into another inaccurate assumption. "You said that your girlfriend was at the party. Was this a real girlfriend or a make pretend girlfriend?" Now Tommy is becoming annoyed. "I'm too old for a pwetend girlfriend. Me and Yvonne are getting married in June." Tommy has wiped away the last of Barbara's assumptions. Realizing that she was only digging herself a deeper hole she decides to give up on discrediting Tommy. Hell, she was starting to fall in love with this personable challenged man herself. "No further questions." Walsh states head held down in resignation.

Excusing Tommy from the witness box Barkham also thanks him for his testimony. Stepping down Tommy then walks over to the defense table. He stands over Sharon. She looks up adoringly at him. "My mom said

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dat you not a bad lady. If dat's true don't do dis bad thing," he begs of the mother-to-be. Barbara signals for the sheriff. Sharon hangs her head and cries. The sheriff takes Tommy gently by his arm and leads him away.

The Hart family all jump up and run to Tommy. They all hug and kiss him as Sharon watches. Barkham starts to bang his gavel, but instead decides that the brave man has earned this show of affection. William sees the judge watching him and his family, so he gathers everyone together, smiles up at Barkham and they leave the courtroom.

The young mother - to - be is visibly shaken by her encounter with Tommy. The judge looks at the jurors then looks around the courtroom and assesses the emotional damage. Enough is enough, he thinks to himself. "Like the rest of you here I am emotionally drained. This roller coaster ride has been very different from my usually boring docket, which I can't wait to get back to, so if there are no more surprise witnesses we will adjourn for today and begin closing arguments tomorrow morning at 8:00 am." He slams down his gavel.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 46
THE MONSTER LURKS

It has been a long day for the defense attorney. After court she had spent hours in the holding area with her client. Sometimes a lawyers job has nothing to do with the law and everything to do with sharing the milk of human kindness. Barbara has listened when she thought her client needed her to listen and has chastised her when she thought that Sharon was being too hard on herself.

It is getting all so late and Walsh knows that Sharon will need all of her strength to weather the storm of tomorrow's session. "You have to be headed back now. I want you well rested and at your best tomorrow." The sheriff leads Sharon away. A weary Barbara drags herself through the empty corridors of the courthouse. Outside there are few people on the streets, yet still she doesn't notice the crackpot from the first day of the trial, Benjamin Torn, lurking in the shadows across the street. It is a pleasant evening and Barbara has so much on her mind that she decides to walk home to clear her head.

The image of the slicker, Jackie Jackson, and the warm giant, Tommy, run through her mind. It is hard for her to believe that someone so smart could be so stupid. A man like Jackie could have been anything yet he chose to be nothing. And then there is Tommy. A happier laugh escapes her soul when she thinks of him. For all one may have believed he had been deprived he is without a doubt happier than most of us so called normal people would ever dare dream of being. Despite this fact most would look upon him with pity when in reality it is he who can and should pity most of us.

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Preoccupied with her thoughts Walsh bumps into a stranger. "Hey lady! Watch where you're going!" the stranger demands. Suddenly Barbara becomes aware of everyone and everything around her. "God, am I stupid or what? What in the world am I doing out here this time of night walking alone. There are more nuts than normal people in the world," she scolds herself. Just as quickly her attitude changes. "It's ridiculous to be ruled by your paranoia. It's a beautiful night and I should be able to walk home if I want to without fearing for my safety." Change of attitude or not the truth is the city is a scary place, day or night.

There is the sound of footsteps all around Barbara. Looking to her left she spies a couple passing. She sighs a sigh of relief. Looking to her right there are two groups walking along. Just when she is beginning to feel even more foolish about being paranoid she looks behind her and spots a familiar face, Ben, following her. Although she can't place where she knows him from his face is familiar and disturbing. The attorney runs over to one of the groups of passersby and asks, "Could you wait with me while I hail a cab. I think someone is following me," as she speaks Benjamin passes by and continues on. Cautiously she watches him, but he never looks back. Relieved she laughs then turns to the two men and the woman. "I guess I was just letting my imagination get the best of me," she offers in her defense. The woman understands Barbara's fears and offers their services to wait with Barbara. Feeling that she has been childish and very determined not to be ruled by her fears Barbara thanks the Good Samaritans, but forges on alone.

When her apartment comes in sight she feels a sense

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of euphoria. Then her heart quickens as she hears the sound of footsteps running toward her. Spinning around she spots the angry Benjamin coming toward her. It is at that moment she remembers the man. A primal scream escapes her lips, "Aaaaaaaa...!" Benjamin is upon her. "You're trying to help that baby killing bitch! Now who's gonna help you?" threateningly he demands. By now the two adversaries have made their way to the bottom step of Barbara's apartment building. At the top of the steps stands one of her neighbors, Raymond Clary. He had heard Barbara's screams and had come to her rescue. "I am," Raymond answers Benjamin's question. The mad man's attention had been drawn away from the frightened woman and she used this distraction to inch away from him. "Mind your own business!" Torn warns Raymond. The neighbor takes a bat from behind his back. "Be on your way fellas." A pissed off Torn runs up the stairs and slams himself into Raymond's middle, knocking him down and knocking the bat loose. Poor Raymond, his head strikes the top step as he falls and he is killed. Benjamin lifts the fallen man's head in his hands. There is blood. "You should have mind your own damn business," is Torn's sardonic reply.

Meanwhile Barbara is running down the street screaming for help. The sadistic murderer gives chase. The fearful Barbara hears the sound of her pursuer's footsteps echoing through the night. Her heart races and thumps achingly in her chest. Perspiration of terror beads upon her forehead. She stumbles and almost falls. Stopping for a moment she removes her high heel shoes then runs again. As Barbara reaches the nearby alleyway Benjamin catches up to her and shoves her into the alley. "You don't want to hurt me," she tries to reason with this

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madman. An evil laugh comes from the disturbed individual. "There you are ... wrong again. I do very much want to hurt you and other people like you. The world is going to hell in a hand basket because of the baby killers, politicians and you lawyers. You lawyers are the worst. You sell your souls for money and fame." Benjamin pushes the frightened Barbara against the wall of a building. He looks her up and down, lasciviously. "You're not a bad looking broad. Maybe I should have a little fun before I kill you?" he threatens. Angry, Barbara loses her head and slaps Benjamin. "You're nothing more than an animal ... a pig. You don't give a damn about the children. Creeps like you make me sick. Pretending to be so noble when all you really want is an excuse to strike out at someone ... anyone. Why? Tell me ... did your daddy molest you?" she taunts him. Enraged Torn strikes out, knocking Barbara to the ground. As she looks up at her tormentor a purplish bruise appears under her right eye. Defiantly Walsh spits up at him. Reaching down Benjamin tears open the top two buttons of Barbara's blouse. She strikes out at him with her hands and feet while she continues to screams. Ear piercing yells bounce off of the alley walls. Totally out of control Benjamin tears the blouse completely open, exposing her bra covered breasts. Again the insane man laughs as he tears her skirt away from her body. Barbara covers herself with her hands and continues to scream. The beast climbs in between her legs. She cries and screams. One hand chokes Barbara's neck while with the other hand Torn reaches in between them to undo his pants. Like a mad cat Barbara scratches at his face. Blood trickles from the scratches she's made on his face, but the psychopath only laughs harder. Then she suffers a most horrible violation, he enters her. Feeling totally defeated

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she wilts like a dried flower. Her sobs and Benjamin's groans are the only sounds of the night.

Whack! That is the sound which precedes Benjamin falling away from Barbara and onto the alley's floor. A policeman has struck him in the back of his head with his night stick. The officer turns his back on a fallen Benjamin in order to offer his jacket to Barbara. She sobs some more as she wraps herself in the garment. The officer had only let his guard down for a moment, but all too quickly Benjamin has recovered from the attack and now stands behind him. Seeing Benjamin Barbara screams, but too late to do the policeman any good. The fiend stabs the officer with a Swiss army knife. The policeman falls to the ground. The sound of sirens fills the night. Turning to his victim once more Benjamin threatens, "I'll see you after the trial, Miss Lawyer. And if you know what's good for you, you will lose," he turns and runs away.

The distraught attorney runs from the alley and stands in the middle of the street waving her hands in an attempt to flag down the police. Finally a patrol car stops. Uniformed officers exit the car. "I think he killed a policeman!" the barely coherent Barbara babbles. She leads the officers to the alley where their fellow officer lies on the ground bleeding, but alive. The first policeman sees to his colleague. The second policeman walks the shaky woman back to their patrol car, where he places her in the back seat. There is an APB out on Benjamin based upon the description Barbara has given the police. The composite drawings has Torn scruffy, bearded and like both times she had seem him wearing paramilitary dress.

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In front of the mirror in his cheap motel room a clean cut Torn stands. He is dressed in a \$600.00 designer suit, which he hasn't worn since he gave up being an accountant. Under the cover of darkness and hiding behind the new persona he has donned he slips out of his motel room unseen.

Across the street from the courthouse, sitting on a bench, the very normal looking Ben Torn sits waiting. One policeman after another walks by him, but none recognizes that he is the man that they are seeking. In plain view the monster lurks.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 47
BUILDING WALLS

The strange thing about nearing the end of a task is not basking in one's glory or sulking over defeat, but lamenting the coming lack of direction for your life. With all that Bradley has lost this is more true for him at this moment. As he sits alone he glances around what he had once called home and tells himself, "If I win it's great for the kids. If I lose maybe someone else can bring reason to this insanity. Either way he knows that he will soon be floating adrift for the remainder of his life. Without Janet he has lost his bearings. Though he is sure that Cynthia wants him to try to find love once again with her, it isn't going to happen. The one thing he is positive of is that he can not bear ever going through this pain again. The law has been his salvation these past weeks, but he has seen enough of man's inhumanity to man, so still he wonders, "What comes next for Bradley Dalton? What next?" No answers are forthcoming.

It is almost midnight when Bradley's doorbell rings. Irritated he throws open the door, ready to curse his late night visitor. In the doorway stands a drunken Lamp, holding a half empty bottle of scotch. "You gonna invite me in or what?" he asks in a drunken stupor. Bradley beckons his friend inside. A surprised Bradley talks to Lamp's back as Lamp staggers across his living room and plops down onto his couch. "I didn't even know that you knew where I lived." Laughing, face down on the couch Lamp admits, "I didn't until tonight. I looked you up in the phone book." Bradley has crossed the room and stands over his drunken friend. "Was there something that you just had to talk to me about tonight?" Lamp rolls over and stares up at Bradley. "All my life

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I've chased woman ... don't apologize for it ... never wanted to get married or any of that mush ... but when I look at Cynthia ... boy, she gets under my skin. You know what I mean? Of course you know what I mean ... you had Janet. I don't say that what I feel is as all consuming as what you shared, but I do care and I won't let you hurt her. You should never have made love to her. She loves you. Always has. Don't lead her on. Don't be a selfish prick." Lamp rattles on and on. "Not that it's any of your business, but I do intend to tell her that it isn't going to work out between us. After the trial is over," Bradley answers. Getting up and stumbling toward the door Lamp mumbles, "Forget it! Can't let anything interfere with her performance during your precious crusade. Can we?" Before they can reach the door the doorbell rings again. "Now who the hell can that be?" a tired Bradley wonders. To his surprise it's Cynthia. "Where is he?" she demands. Then she spots Lamp. "I knew you were going to come here," she accuses. "Friends don't betray confidences," she reminds him. "What did he tell you?" she asks Bradley. "Nothing that I want to talk about right now. In case you have forgotten we have a big trial to finish up tomorrow." Grabbing Lamp by his ear Cynthia pulls him toward the front door. She whispers in his ear, "If you've blown this for me I will never forgive you." Cynthia then opens the door and pushes Lamp out into the night. She follows him out stopping only long enough to say goodnight to Bradley. As the door closes Bradley hears the drunken Lamp's last words, "You should love me. You really should."

Bradley stands staring out his window at his friends. A part of him wants to cry out for Cynthia to stay. He knows that she is probably his last best

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chance to stay a part of this thing we call life, but his voice refuses to pay any heed to his mind's wishes. A single utterance may have saved him, but instead the final wall is built. He has chosen foolishly, but he has chosen.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 48
CLOSING STATEMENTS

Click ... click ... click is the sound of Barbara's heels upon the marble floors of the courthouse hallways. Though scared and bruised she refuses to be beaten by this mad man. Entering the courtroom she walks over to the defense table and sits down beside her client. The would-be-mother looks over at Barbara in horror. "What happened to you?" she asks. "Nothing. The police are taking care of it." Sharon lowers her head. "Was it because of me?" Walsh smiles and shakes her head no. After all Sharon has enough to deal with already.

"The world has gone mad. The line between right and wrong seems so blurred. It seems that evil people prosper while those who try to do what's right are punished. What is a person to do, Ms. Walsh?" Sharon asks. Remembering the events of the previous night the lawyer fights back her tears and answers, "After last night I don't think that I'm the one to ask." It nears time for court to begin. A wavering Sharon turns to her lawyer and asks, "Did you hear what Tommy Hart said to me yesterday?" Sharon doesn't wait for an answer. "He said don't do this bad thing." Walsh tries to explain that Tommy doesn't understand. The mother-to-be laughs, "He's in the best position of us all to understand. He's living the life my child might live and he's happy." Barbara poses a question to Sharon she believes Sharon has overlooked, "What if he's worst?" Head bowed the mother-to-be answers, "I will love him unconditionally." The lawyer demands of her client, "Are you saying that you've changed your mind? Because if you have I can probably broker a deal with the D.A." Walsh offers. "I'm just not sure," she answers.

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Court is in session. Since Sharon is still undecided Walsh stands before the jurors about to begin her closing arguments. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury ... I am an attorney. It is my job to look at the facts in a cold and dispassionate fashion and as jurors you are supposed to do the same. We have a doctor who may or may not have been torn between his professional ethics and his personally traumatic experiences. We also have a mother who wants very much to have her child, but questions what kind of life her child will have." Then pointing to Bradley she accuses, "... and then we have this attorney who brings in a scoundrel who has failed to live up to his advantages and a lovable challenged man who by anyone's interpretation has far exceeded what society might have expected of him, given his disadvantages. So how can we expect you to look just at the facts? Well ... as a matter of law we simply do. "

"The facts in this case are ... the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court, has ruled that during the first trimester of a pregnancy a woman may abort a pregnancy. Sharon Tomlin is still in her first trimester. Therefore there has been no crime committed by either of my clients. It's that simple." A portion of the spectators in the court clap for Barbara. Barkham bangs his gavel and things quiet quickly.

As Walsh sits down Bradley looks out over the courtroom. He points to the defense attorney. "Ms. Walsh is right about one thing, all of you are supposed to look at the facts." The sly lawyer walks over to and stands next to a mother with her child, knowing that the juror's eyes will follow him. The facts are until recently all abortions were illegal.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

The law was rewritten. Why? Fact ... the political climate in America changed. Powerful forces demanded a compromise. The men on capital hill knew that there was no way that the majority of Americans would ever accept giving abortion cart blanch, so they figured out a way to allow it for a portion of the pregnancy. Everyone gets some of what they want." Bradley then leans across the bar and tickles the baby under the chin. He then stands up straight and stares directly at the jury. "Well ... almost everyone." The D.A. then walks over to the jury box and stares each juror in the eye in turn. "The Supreme Court has said in other cases that it frowns on "Irrebuttable Presumptions," which is a single definition for person under the 14th amendment when there are other viable definitions for any given group. In their opinions in the case of Roe vs Wade the justices stated that there are other viable definitions for person as it pertains to unborn children, but still they accepted this "Irrebuttable Presumption" - viability - as the singular definition. Why? Fact! The political climate at the time demanded a compromise. Don't you do what's politically correct. Do what's legally required of you, protect the children." The prosecutor turns and walks back to his seat.

An exhausted Barkham turns to the jurors. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury at the beginning of this trial I instructed you that you would be faced with a very complicated legal issue. I gave you definitions for certain terms and advised you to pay close attention as this trial proceeded. Still after all is said and done it is your job to sift through all of this information and the testimony and interpret and apply the law. I am about to release you so that you may go and deliberate the facts of

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this case and return with a verdict which you believe accurately reflects your understanding of the law. Not your personal convictions, but again, the law. Madam Foreperson you and the other jurors may adjourn to deliberate the verdict." The jurors all stand and file out led by one sheriff deputy while followed by another.

The closing statements are only the beginning.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 49
THE DEAL

The hardest part about waiting for a jury's decision is not knowing how long it will take. In a case where emotions run high and the facts are so disputable it isn't uncommon for the attorneys to use the jury process as a time for bartering deals.

Along with her attorney Sharon sits in the holding area of the courthouse talking. "You asked me earlier if I had changed my mind. I can answer you now. I want to have my baby. I want to give it the unconditional love that I've spent my lifetime searching for, but not finding. Most of all I want my child to have a chance at happiness. Hell! A chance is all any of us truly have." Sharon reasons. "I will support and work with you irregardless of what you decide to do. It's your choice that I'm fighting for here," Walsh assures her client. "Do it. Make a deal with that evil man." Sharon instructs Barbara. Walsh laughs. She starts to defend Bradley, but guesses that her words would probably fall on deaf ears right now.

About an hour later all of the parties to the case are gathered together in the holding area. Each side stares at the other like combatants of a boxing match. Barbara breaks the silence. "I called for this meeting to offer a compromise." Already Bradley is shaking his head, no. "Compromise is why we're here now." Barbara ignores his words and forges ahead laying out her plan. "You get everything that you want except my clients don't go to jail." Bradley sits back. "I'm listening," he answers. "If you lose or win today there would be an immediate appeal. Little is going to be determined here. My clients have been moved by issues which you brought

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up during the trial. Dr. Harrison now has reservations about his own objectivity and because of this he can no longer in good conscience perform any abortion procedures, irregardless of the circumstance. Ms. Tomlin on the other hand was so touched by Tommy Hart that she has decided that she wants to have her baby. You can drop the charges against them then file a Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the Supreme Court on behalf of all unborn children since that is where this will have to finally be decided. Everyone wins," The defense attorney suggests.

Everyone watches Bradley as he runs the proposal through his head. There are some safeguards that he wants in place, but over all he agrees with Barbara that these are two good people who were trying to do what they believed was right. There is no need to cause them any further distress. "You've got a deal with one stipulation, Ms. Tomlin must wear an ankle monitor and be confined to her home for the remainder of her first trimester." The defense attorney is annoyed at Bradley's show of distrust. "Bradley ..." she starts, but is interrupted by Sharon. "It's okay. I understand Mr. Dalton's reservations and I don't mind. After all it's only three more weeks now and it's better than being in jail."

Everything is working out as well as Bradley could have imagined at this point. He is relieved ... no, satisfied ... no ... he is happy at how well things seem to be working out. Smiles abound in the holding room now that a settlement has been agreed upon. It is Bradley who informs Sharon that she will probably be released from custody sometime this afternoon. Sharon gets up from her seat, crosses the room and

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hugs Bradley.

Happy for her Bradley tells Sharon that he wishes her and her baby all of the joy that this world has to offer. For the first time in weeks Sharon cries tears of joy. "Thank you Mr. Dalton, for everything ... unconditionally." They all laugh. Rushing over to Bradley a delighted Barbara hugs and kisses him. "I knew that you couldn't have changed into the bastard that you seemed to be as of late," she offers a left hand compliment. "Thank you. I think," Bradley answers, a little confused.

One would think that no one could find fault with this deal, but you would be wrong.

IRREBUTTABLE PRESUMPTION
CHAPTER 50
THE AFTERMATH

Across the street from the courthouse Benjamin Torn waits patiently, but anxiously for the end to play out. The fiendish man closely watches all of the activity around the court building. Two reporters walk pass him talking. "I hear that the prosecutor and the defense have struck a deal," the first reporter comments. "Why wouldn't he? He knows that he can't win. Roe vs Wade pretty much put this abortion fight to rest," the second reporter answers confidently.

After the two reporters have passed an angry Benjamin rips the arm from the bench upon which he sits. "There is no morality left in the world. I thought Dalton was a true warrior for the cause. I guess after I kill the bitch I'll put a bullet in his head too," Torn tells himself.

Still the police walk by Benjamin again and again. He lowers his head. They fail to recognize him, clean cut and wearing a suit.

Sometime later, in the courtroom, the drama is being played out to a capacity crowd. There is a buzz going around the courtroom about the possibility of a deal having been made. Anna has leaked the information to a reporter friend of hers, he reported it to his paper, the paper is affiliated with radio and TV stations, so before you know it everyone knows something of what is going on.

Showing some integrity Anna didn't give her friend any of the details of the deal, so a lot of speculation is still going on.

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A solemn Judge Barkham reenters the court and takes his seat behind the bench. The jury files back into the courtroom. The atmosphere in the court is electric. Everyone sits on pins and needles awaiting the bombshell that they are sure is soon to come. The judge turns to the jury. "To each of you ladies and gentlemen of the jury I am sure that you are wondering why you were brought back to the court before you could complete your deliberations. Well ... the D.A. and the defense have decided not to go forward with this case in this forum. The court thanks you for your time and efforts. This case is dismissed," Hoping to avoid the press Barkham hurriedly gets up and leaves out, relieved that for him this episode is over.

A mixture of boos, catcalls and cheers fill the courtroom. There is so much pandemonium in the courtroom only a few people notice that one of the sheriff's deputies is kneeling down beside Sharon and placing a monitor on her ankle. The press attempts to converge on the defense and prosecution tables, but are kept at bay by the other sheriff's deputies, the bailiff and the sheriff himself.

Unsure Sharon turns to Barbara and asks, "What's next?" A warm smile from her attorney helps reassure the would-be-mother that it is almost over. "You're free to go home. The sheriff is going to accompany you home where you will have to remain for the next three weeks, but after that the monitor will come off and the nightmare will be behind you," her lawyer explains.

The sheriff's deputies have allowed Bernice to come around the barrier and join her daughter. The two women embrace one another. "Everything is going to

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be alright from here on out," Bernice promises her daughter. Extra deputies have entered the court room at Barkham's request. The deputies clear the courtroom of all except the defense and prosecution teams, the defendants, Bernice and the friend - Clarice.

The reporters and spectators have gathered outside on the court house steps. They await the exiting of the principals of this drama. The media especially wants the details behind the last minute dismissal of the charges.

As the courthouse doors open the deputies lead the way. Behind them are Sharon and Dr. Harrison. Close behind the defendants are the lawyers, the family and one friend. The reporters stick flashing cameras in their faces and push right pass the lawmen. They also stick microphones in Sharon's face and scream their questions at her. "Are you still going to have an abortion?" How do you think the jury would have ruled?" a barrage of questions keep coming. "My clients have nothing to say at this time." Walsh answers. The policemen push the crowd downward as Sharon and the others make their way down the courthouse stairs.

Seeing the commotion outside of the courthouse Benjamin gets up and runs across the street. He is now mingling among the reporters and making his way up the courthouse stairs toward Sharon. Protesters with their signs of condemnation or supporters with their signs of support and encouragement rush up the stairs also. The reporters and Benjamin have breached the safety barrier of the deputies. They are now only an arms length away from Sharon. Then it happens. Benjamin pulls a gun from under his coat

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jacket. At that moment Walsh spots the scratches, recognizes him and screams. The lawmen and the crowd freeze for the briefest of moments, but that is long enough for the madman to fire two bullets into Sharon's chest. As Bradley watches Sharon fall backwards onto the courthouse stairs. Time seems to slow down. It is as if she is falling in slow motion. Two of the deputies grab Torn and wrestle the gun from his grasp and tosses him to the ground.

The crowd quickly disperses upon hearing the gunshots. The deputies have Benjamin under control and are placing handcuffs on him. The crowd is being drawn back to the tragic scene. The mother is the first to kneel down next to her daughter. Sharon stares up at her mother and smiles, then she closes her eyes. Harrison eases Bernice aside and takes her place next to Sharon. Barbara hollers for someone to call for an ambulance. Harrison places his hand against Sharon's neck. There is no pulse. The doctor looks up at Bradley and shakes his head. No one who is there will ever forget the soul shattering scream which follows. "Nooo! Dear god, nooooo!" is Bernice's unanswered prayer.

Like vultures the press hovers around. Some of them even keep on taking pictures of the dead woman and her mother. The deputies are now fed up with this feeding frenzy and ushers the press away.

The first two deputies have gotten Torn to his feet. Bradley walks over and stares him in the eyes. There is no sign of humanity there. As those dead eyes stare back at the D.A. defiantly Benjamin yells out proudly, "One less baby killing bitch!" Grabbing a hold of him by his collar Bradley tells him, "She had decided to have her child, so you are the only

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baby killer here." Bradley releases Torn's collar then turns to the policemen. He instructs them, "Take him away. The charges are two counts of murder in the first degree."

An anguish filled Harrison and Clarice help Bernice up to her feet as the paramedics take Sharon's body away. The reporters are still hovering around. Pushing pass the reporters and the crowd Bradley walks away from the heartbreakin scene and any chance for a happy life.

While Bradley hides from the world Cynthia files the Petition for the Writ of Certiorari to the Supreme Court on behalf of all unborn children. In February of 2020 the Supreme Court rules that "viability" is an "Irrebuttable Presumption" and accepts conception as one of several alternative legal definitions for life as it pertains to unborn children thus overturning Roe vs Wade and putting an end to legalized abortions.

The ex D.A. Bradley Dalton takes no solace in this victory for nothing will bring back Janet, Samantha, Sharon or Sharon's unborn child.

THE END