



EDGE

OF

A NOVEL

TRUTH

JANICE CANTORE

PRAISE FOR JANICE CANTORE

Janice Cantore is in a league of her own and at the top of her game with her newest razor-sharp procedural, *Edge of Truth*. It is unputdownable and a must-read for fans of romantic suspense and crime thrillers!

JESSICA R. PATCH, bestselling author of the FBI: Strange Crimes Unit series

Be prepared to do nothing until you've finished reading this masterful suspense novel! I took a peek at the first page and couldn't stop until the last sentence.

DIANN MILLS, bestselling, award-winning author of *Canyon of Deceit*, on *Every Deadly Suspicion*

A thrilling read full of heart-stopping tension and great twists. An awesome blend of suspense and romance. Don't miss *Every Deadly Suspicion*.

DARLENE L. TURNER, *Publishers Weekly* bestselling author of the Crisis Rescue Team series

Janice's books are always something I look forward to reading. She hooks you from page one. I highly recommend you hide somewhere fun to read this book because you won't want to be interrupted.

LYNETTE EASON, bestselling, award-winning author of the Lake City Heroes series, on *Every Deadly Suspicion*

Cantore draws on her real-life experience as a police officer to write compelling thrillers that accurately portray cop life and also offer a deep thread of faith, along with interesting characters.

LIBRARY JOURNAL on *Every Deadly Suspicion*

This timely police procedural from a twenty-two-year veteran of the Long Beach, Calif., police satisfies.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *Code of Courage*

In *Breach of Honor*, Janice Cantore tells a complex tale of deceit and backroom deals that leaves you wondering who the good guys actually are. . . . I could not wait to get to the end and see how it all tied together.

HALLEE BRIDGEMAN, bestselling author of the Love and Honor series

Janice Cantore has crafted an adventure filled with brutal crimes, heartbreaking injustice, shocking twists, a gentle romance, and hard-won faith. Words like page turning, breath stealing, and pulse racing, while accurate, don't begin to do it justice.

LYNN H. BLACKBURN, award-winning author of the Dive Team Investigations series, on *Breach of Honor*

A complex tale of murder, deceit, and faith challenges, complete with multifaceted characterizations, authentic details, and action scenes, even a subtle hint of romance . . . [all] well integrated into a suspenseful storyline that keeps pages turning until the end.

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW on *Lethal Target*

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Tyndale House Publishers
Carol Stream, Illinois

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Cover design by Faceout Studio, Spencer Fuller

Interior design by Brandi Davis

Published in association with the literary agency of Books & Such Literary Management, 52 Mission Circle, Suite 122, PMB 170, Santa Rosa, CA 95409.

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For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-8797-1

Printed in the United States of America

32	31	30	29	28	27	26
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

PROLOGUE

Officer Lainie Jensen yawned as she patrolled her downtown Long Beach beat. The early morning darkness had a hypnotic effect when the police radio was quiet. Her partner had called in sick, so she would be alone for the entire shift. It was the first time in her brief career that had happened.

At first, fears of inadequacy about performing her job without having that safety net of an experienced officer next to her threatened to overwhelm.

What if something crazy happens?

Will I make the right decisions should I need to act fast?

Will I do my job right?

But in the squad earlier, when the teasing started, she knew she'd be fine.

"Hey, rook, you want us to put some training wheels on your cruiser?"

"Maybe give you the nice, quiet academy beat?"

Lainie still smiled a bit when she recalled the jibes. The ribbing in squad meetings didn't bug her. The older, seasoned cops only wasted their teasing on peers. Though technically a rookie until the next academy class graduated, she was off probation and a peer now—a part of the team.

EDGE OF TRUTH

Once seated in her black-and-white, nervousness spread through her gut like melted butter on dry bread. But it was an okay feeling. It meant she was alert and paying attention. Her duty was to search for trouble—and head straight for it. Lainie wanted to keep a little edginess.

The novelty of being by herself wore off quickly. Being solo on graveyard patrol meant she was a Robert car—a car dispatched only to report calls, of which so far there had only been four. She wrote some tickets and assisted on a few calls, but overall it had been a boring, uneventful night.

Around 6:00 a.m., with two hours left in her shift, more traffic began to roll as early risers headed to work. Lainie felt more alert, hoping to write some traffic violations before she went EOW, end of watch, to the station.

She'd imagined that a career in law enforcement would be a little more exciting than it had been tonight. Training officers warned recruits that real police work was not like what they watched on television—95 percent adrenaline and 5 percent downtime—but rather the reverse. Once field training began, Lainie learned right away how true that was. Officers on cop shows hopped from one hot call to the next. Real-life police work just didn't move at that frenetic pace.

Still, Lainie wouldn't be doing any other job.

After a few circuits around downtown, even ticket writing didn't pan out—everyone was driving according to the rules. Today was her Friday, so she considered heading in early. Then a black Lincoln Town Car ran a red light right in front of her without even slowing.

Lainie activated her light bar, turned right, and accelerated after the vehicle. It wasn't speeding, and she caught up in about half a block.

Ignoring her lights, the driver continued rolling, running a stop sign.

Though adrenaline surged—a vehicle failing to yield could be a stolen car—her instincts said the guy was probably drunk. He didn't seem to be evading per se; he just wasn't stopping. She grabbed her radio mike and asked dispatch to run the plate for wants and warrants.

“Robert 8, 28/29 on license plate 4-David-Tom-William-987. Northbound Chestnut Street approaching 7th.”

“10-4, Robert 8, stand by.”

They continued rolling north, and the vehicle ran another light. Lainie beeped her siren and got no response.

“Robert 8, 28/29 returns no want or warrant, application in process.”

Lainie groaned. It wasn't stolen, but *app in process* meant she couldn't know who the car truly belonged to. Time to let everyone know the guy wasn't stopping and that she thought the driver was drunk.

“10-4, be advised I'm following the vehicle north on Chestnut, just crossing 10th. He's failing to yield, probably deuce.”

She hoped her voice was steady. Her adrenaline had ramped up, but she didn't want any of the older guys accusing her of being hysterical. Traffic stops could always go wrong; every training officer had instilled that lesson.

“Any unit in the area to assist Robert 8 with a vehicle failing to yield, northbound Chestnut crossing 10th.”

Lainie muttered her standard prayer, “Lord, I pray for wisdom and safety—for all involved in this stop.”

Several units answered up to assist.

Lainie turned her siren on, hoping that a bunch of units didn't show up just to watch her wrestle with a drunk driver.

The siren had no effect. The Lincoln continued north without even pausing at intersections. Thankfully traffic was light, and they were in a residential area. Maybe he was heading home.

The car came to an abrupt stop. He didn't pull over; he simply stopped in the middle of the street. As if all of a sudden he saw the cop car behind him.

Lainie jerked to a stop as well, shutting down her siren but leaving the emergency lights on while she notified dispatch. “Robert 8, the vehicle stopped on Chestnut just north of 10th Street.”

EDGE OF TRUTH

Another unit pulled in behind her, and she heard them tell dispatch that they were on-scene, 10-97. It was Jason Griggs and Sara Green, both from her class. That was good; an officer with more time in patrol might jump in and take over.

This is my chance to handle something from start to finish on my own, Lainie thought as she stepped out, staying behind the door, never taking her eyes off the Lincoln Town Car.

Sara came up on her left and Jason took the cover-officer position on the passenger side.

“What’d he do?” Sara asked.

“It’s just traffic. He blew a couple of lights and a stop sign. Like I said, probably a deuce.”

Sara nodded knowingly. This time of the morning, drunk drivers were not uncommon.

Lainie stepped from behind her door and started for the driver’s side of the Lincoln, moving cautiously. Eyes on the back of the driver’s head, her adrenaline still running high, she worked hard to fight off tunnel vision.

Pausing at the trunk, she placed a hand on the lid to make certain it was closed. The vehicle’s motor still rumbled, and that bothered her. The back windows were darkly tinted, and she couldn’t tell immediately if anyone else was in the car.

Flashlight in her left hand, right hand on the butt of her gun, Lainie approached the driver’s door, stopped just at the doorpost, and shone her light at the driver.

The window was down. Behind the wheel was a white man, maybe forty, squinting in the beam of her flashlight. He wore a button-down shirt with a black necktie partially untied, as if he’d begun to take it off and then stopped. He craned his neck and peered back at Lainie with bleary gray eyes.

Definitely drunk. A nasty, jagged scar ran across his left cheek.

He held up a hand to shade his eyes from her light. “Is there a

problem?" A pungent odor of alcohol wafted up toward Lainie when the man spoke.

"Can you turn off the car please?"

"What did I do?"

"Please turn the car off."

He mumbled something that sounded like a curse, but he complied.

"You ran a couple of red lights. Do you have your license, registration, and proof of insurance?"

"It's not my car."

"You're driving. Do you have a license?"

"I'm almost home."

"Sir, I need to see your license." Adrenaline dissipated in a cloud of annoyance. Drunks were rarely easy to deal with.

Lainie leaned forward, shining the beam of her flashlight around the car's interior. Someone was lying down in the back seat, but Lainie left that to Jason. She needed to concentrate on the driver, grateful she had backup with her.

She asked one more time for his license.

"Officer, you're making a huge mistake. I'm almost home." He had both hands on the steering wheel, and he now stared straight ahead.

"Sir, can you step out of the car please?"

"I said, I'm almost home."

She shoved the flashlight in her sap pocket to free up her hand, then pulled on the door handle and opened the door. "I need you to step out of the vehicle." Lainie had clear probable cause to administer a standard field sobriety test.

Anger flashed across his features. This time she heard the curse loud and clear, but he climbed out of the car.

The odor of alcohol grew much stronger now, the stench rolling across her nostrils in a noxious wave. He stumbled and she caught his arm. Sara stepped up and grabbed his other arm.

"What is this?" He stiffened. "You guys are wrong, wrong I tell

you.” His words were slurred. He attempted to pull away, but they both held on tight.

“I smell alcohol on your breath, sir. How much have you had to drink tonight?”

“You will regret this. It’s wrong, I tell you, wrong.” Like most drunks, he repeated himself. He tried to jerk away again, but his balance and coordination were almost nonexistent.

As she and Sara guided the drunk back toward her patrol car, Jason stepped up to help.

“We got him,” Lainie said. “Can you check out the person in the back seat?”

He nodded and returned to the Lincoln’s passenger side.

Lainie and Sara guided the driver to the hood of the black-and-white. Lainie had already made the determination that she had enough objective symptoms of driving under the influence to arrest him without the balance test.

“Do you have any weapons on you?” She began to pat him down.

“I’ve got nothing to say.”

Lainie felt a wallet in his left back pocket and then the butt of a gun in his right front pocket.

“Gun!” She grabbed his right wrist and twisted it behind his back while Sara did the same with his left arm.

“Ow! Stop it,” he cried as he resisted.

Recharged with adrenaline now, Lainie held on tight and quickly reached for her handcuffs. Once he was secure, she retrieved the gun. It was a small semiautomatic handgun, probably a .22. She handed the gun to Sara and then retrieved the wallet.

“Lainie.”

“What?” She turned to Jason.

He looked pale in the glare of the flashing red-and-yellow light bar. “You have to see this.”

“Okay. Let me get him in the car first.” She flipped open the wallet. The drunk’s name was Dallas Vine.

“Mr. Vine, you’re under arrest for driving under the influence. And for carrying a concealed weapon.”

He said nothing.

Lainie finished her pat down and found nothing else on the man. With the gun and the wallet on the hood of the car, Sara helped Lainie slide Vine into the back of the unit and strap him in. He was tight-lipped, maybe sobering up a bit. Once she closed the door, she turned to Jason. “Show me.”

They walked to the Lincoln’s rear passenger door, and Jason opened it.

A woman was sprawled across the back seat, half dressed.

“She’s dead.”

Lainie stared at Jason. “You checked her pulse?”

He nodded. “She’s cold, Lainie. Been dead awhile. Bullet hole in her head. You got more than a drunk driver.”

Had she arrested her first killer?

CHAPTER 1

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

Tuesday, just before noon, on a beautiful spring day, Detective Lainie Jensen and her partner Mike Pepper left the courthouse and faced a gauntlet of reporters and news cameras. After a twelve-month investigation, they'd just closed the book on a serial rapist, so the attention was expected. The case had gone to the jury first thing this morning, and they only deliberated three hours.

"Detectives, do you have a statement for us?"

"Was the verdict satisfying?"

"Did the quick verdict surprise you?"

"What about Hammer's claim that the DNA sample was planted? That he is, in fact, innocent?"

Lainie had to stop for that one. She searched the group for the voice. Callen West, a local reporter for a Long Beach weekly. West was a vocal activist for what he called "bail reform," but in Lainie's opinion, he espoused not arresting anyone for anything, meaning no one should ever go to jail.

"What about it? The evidence proved that Cory Hammer was a serial rapist. We caught him in the act, and his DNA tied him to

thirteen other attacks. The jury was spot-on with its verdict. I would have expected nothing less.”

“You profiled him! It’s not a stretch to think that you planted evidence.”

Lainie started to head toward West, but Mike grabbed her arm and kept her walking toward the car. Lainie let him. If she got in West’s face, she’d get herself in trouble. And she’d already been in enough trouble at work—she couldn’t afford any more.

They continued through the crowd, ignoring the rest of the reporters’ questions. West’s gaze shot daggers at her. He would never be called a friend to law enforcement.

Once in the car, she blew out an aggravated breath. “That guy.”

Mike chuckled as he started the engine. “He sure knows how to rev you up.”

“He sat in the courtroom; he saw the evidence and heard the testimony.” She shook her head. “Still, he thinks the guy is innocent. Or worse, that we fudged the evidence.”

“It gets him clicks.”

“Humph.” Lainie was just happy to be done with court. It was, of course, essential, but with their caseload, it felt like lost time. She was eager to be busy with police work. Lainie had wanted to do this job since she was seven, when her best friend, Jaycee, had been kidnapped in front of her house.

The police had found and rescued her seven hours later. The picture on the newspaper’s front page of Jaycee cradled by a large police officer, her arms wrapped around his neck, was indelibly inked in Lainie’s mind and heart. The incident fomented a desire to be a cop herself, to be a dragon slayer and a rescuer.

“Thanks for the save, by the way.”

Mike shrugged. “That’s what partners are for.”

After the trouble she’d had with internal affairs, Lainie was lucky to have Mike. An inch taller than her, five foot ten to her five nine,

he was well-built and fit, having dabbled in boxing and MMA before he became a cop. He kept his head shaved and wore a bushy black mustache. Mike was devoted to his wife and their special-needs son. He was thirty-six, the same age as Lainie, though she'd been a cop a year longer, so technically she was the senior partner. But they played to each other's strengths, and there never was a power struggle.

Mike drove and headed for their predetermined lunch spot. Lainie pulled out her tablet to review the details of their next case, now that the rape case was over and done. As violent crimes detectives, they handled assaults, rapes, serious domestic violence, and just about anything short of murder. At times the work weighed on Lainie—they couldn't save everyone, and some of the victims' stories were heart-wrenching. But she rejoiced in victories like the one they'd had in court today.

The radio crackled on and off with routine police traffic, and she half listened to the happenings in the city. Her best friend on the force, Sara Green, worked day patrol, and Lainie picked out her call sign, 2David23, from time to time.

Beep beep.

The emergency tone caught her attention, and she looked up from the iPad.

"All units and 2David23, incomplete 911 call, possible domestic violence at 345 Elm Street. Respond Code 3."

Lainie glanced over at Mike. They were about to turn into the restaurant lot, but they were only two blocks from the address. On the radio, Sara's voice answered that she was en route, and her siren blared in the background.

"Hey, you up to helping on that? Sara's without her rookie and we're close."

He gave a half shrug. "Sure, we'll get the case anyway if it's a domestic." Mike swung the car in a U-turn and activated the plain car's lights and siren.

Lainie turned up the radio a bit as the dispatcher continued.

"Before the call disconnected, the calling party stated that her boyfriend had hit her and was now threatening her with a knife . . ."

Mike turned the corner on Elm and slowed—at the other end of the street a black-and-white rapidly approached.

Since the emergency tone would keep beeping until someone called Code 4, Lainie advised that they were on-scene so everyone would be aware that the beat car had backup.

Sara had exited her vehicle. By the way she moved, Lainie had to believe she heard or saw something dangerous. Mike saw it too because he sped up and slammed on the brakes when they were one house away from the address.

They both got out and hurried toward the dispatch address.

"Drop the knife!"

Sara clearly faced a threat.

Lainie sprinted up five stairs and saw a courtyard to the right. Sara's back came into view. She repeated the command to drop the knife.

Lainie saw a man holding a woman by the hair. She was on her knees, face bloody, and in his free hand, the man held a knife, a big one.

"I'm not going to prison."

When he spoke, Lainie recognized him. He was what they called a frequent flyer. Someone every beat cop in the city had interacted with at some point. She'd arrested him for burglary when she was in uniform and had noted his name in several reports now that she worked violent crimes. Hank Bucshon.

He jerked the woman's hair and raised the knife.

"Taser, Taser, Taser," Sara said as she deployed the less-than-lethal tool.

The prongs hit the target, and the knife fell to the ground as Bucshon stiffened and fell backward, toppling like a tree. The Taser delivered electrical currents meant to overwhelm the central nervous

EDGE OF TRUTH

system. When it worked like it should, it totally incapacitated a suspect long enough to get him cuffed and secured.

All three of them surged forward. Sara secured the knife and the man, while Lainie helped detangle the woman's hair from Bucshon's clenched fingers. She and Mike moved her to the side as gently and quickly as they could.

The woman sobbed, in shock. Lainie requested paramedics and knelt next to her, comforting her until they arrived.



Later back at the station, after the woman had been admitted to the hospital, Sara called Lainie from booking.

"This guy wants to talk."

Lainie shrugged, not really concerned. After all, they'd witnessed Bucshon while he was threatening his girlfriend with a knife. They didn't need a confession. "I'll be around to talk to him after he's booked."

"No, you don't understand. He wants to talk now. We found some receipts on him. He works for Dallas Vine."

Lainie sat up straight. Sara had her full attention. Dallas Vine—a name Lainie would never forget. The first big arrest of her career. And the first crushing disappointment. "What?"

"He sounds legit. Bucshon's saying he's got inside knowledge, and he wants to spill. He doesn't want to go to jail again; it's a third strike for him."

"I'll be right down." Lainie ended the call, and Mike shot her a quizzical expression.

"Come on, I'll explain on the way downstairs."

Lainie finished telling Mike in the elevator.

"He's totally pulling our legs," he protested as they exited in the basement. "No one rolls over on Vine." Mike shook his head. "You of all people should know that."

“We can talk to Bucshon and figure it out. It’s worth a few minutes of our time.”

She could tell he wasn’t sold.

“What can it hurt?” She went to push open the door to booking, and he stopped her.

“Lainie, you were sued by Vine for harassment. Your obsession with him almost ended your career.”

“Ahh.” Lainie closed her eyes, brought her palms to her forehead. “Mike, that was years ago. I’ve stayed away. Other than reading the occasional news article about him, I haven’t been watching him or searching for evidence against him.”

She opened her eyes, lowered her hands, and held his gaze. “Bucshon dropped right. In. My. Lap. All I want to do is see if he’s on the level.”

Mike said nothing for a few seconds. “Five minutes.” He pushed open the door.

Sara met them in the holding area with Bucshon cuffed to the bench. Hank was a rat-faced guy with a slight build. The burglary he’d committed when Lainie arrested him was a window entry. Wiry and flexible, Bucshon had no trouble getting in and out of small windows. She’d caught him in the alley coming out of one when he tried to run.

Now, he sat on the bench, subdued. Taking a Taser shot tended to do that to people. He’d been checked out by medical personnel and was okay to process.

“You still want to talk?” Lainie asked him.

“I don’t wanna go to jail.”

“I can’t help you there. We saw you about to scalp your girlfriend. I can’t make that go away.”

“You can keep me out of county jail, can’t you?”

Lainie considered this. No one liked going to county jail. Especially those men with small builds and no gang attachments. Hank was only tough when it came to hitting women.

“I’ll listen to what you want to say, then it’s up to the DA.”

EDGE OF TRUTH

He nodded. "I work inside with Vine. I can give you Vine, I promise. Catch your big fish, let the little one swim away."

"Get up."

They walked him to an interview room.

As they sat, Lainie's phone rang and she silenced it. As a matter of form, she advised Bucshon of his Miranda rights and then unhandcuffed him so he could sign the waiver saying he understood his rights and wanted to talk. Once he signed, she recuffed him, hands in front.

"What do you do for Dallas Vine?"

"A little bit of this, a little bit of that."

"Specifics?" Lainie tapped on the desktop with her pen. Mike shot her a look that said, "waste of time."

Bucshon brought a handcuffed hand up to stroke his chin. "I know he ordered that hit two weeks ago on Martin Straight." He held Lainie's gaze with washed-out gray eyes.

She fought to keep her face blank. Straight was not her case, but she knew about it. He was a legitimate businessman, unlike Vine. Straight was well-liked and a vocal critic of Vine's business practices. He had been murdered in his driveway when he pulled in after work. The team working the case had zero clues.

"How do you know?"

"Guys who did it were from out of town, Chicago. They're back there now. Skiff and Charles are their names. Now, that's all I'm giving until I get some assurances."

Before Lainie could answer, someone pounded on the door.

"We're busy right now," Lainie called out.

Then Mike's phone rang. He checked it. "Lainie, it's the chief."

She stared in disbelief. The knock on the door sounded again.

"What is going on?"

They both went to the door. Frustrated, Lainie threw it open.

"We're in the middle of an . . ."

Standing on the other side of the door was a tall, dark-haired man in a suit, not a uniform. His appearance fairly screamed “Fed.” Lainie looked up at him and words fled. He could have walked off a movie set he was so perfect. Sharp blue eyes cut into her. He held up an ID that confirmed he was, in fact, a Fed.

Special Agent Benjamin J. Isaacs, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

“You need to cease and desist. I’m taking Mr. Bucshon into my custody.”

“What? He’s our arrest.” Sara was in the hallway, and she jumped in before Lainie found her voice.

“Not anymore.”

Everyone turned as the voice of Chief Mackall entered the fray. He stepped off the elevator and strode in their direction. “Officer.” He nodded to Sara and then to Lainie. “Detective. You all did great work.” He motioned for Lainie and Mike to step out of the interview room, and he closed the door.

“But Agent Isaacs is from the Bureau. Seems you all have unwittingly stepped into the middle of an FBI investigation.”

“What investigation?” Lainie found her voice as anger overwhelmed the shock.

“I’m not at liberty to relay details,” Isaacs said. “Suffice it to say, Bucshon is part of it. I want him in my custody.”

“He asked to talk; he signed a Miranda waiver.”

“Has he said anything important?” the chief asked.

Lainie wished she could say yes, but she couldn’t. Her gaze bounced from the chief to Isaacs and back again. “We just got started.”

“We’ll be able to do more with what he has to say than you will,” Isaacs said.

“You don’t know what he wanted to talk about. Besides, we saw him almost kill his girlfriend and you want us to let him go?”

Heat rose in Lainie's face. Now over the initial shock of seeing Isaacs, there was no way he would take away her chance to nail Dallas Vine.

"Chief, Bucshon works for Dallas Vine and he wants to talk. Are we going to let the Feds just take him?"

Chief Mackall gave her a sympathetic gaze. "I'm afraid we have to."

"I'm not going to release him," Isaacs said, "if that is any consolation. He will answer to your charges, just not immediately."

"That's no consolation at all." Lainie folded her arms, livid now, hating being condescended to. "This is *our* arrest. No one asked the Feds in on this. How did you even know he was in custody?"

"That information is on a need-to-know basis. I'm sorry, Detective, you don't need to know." Isaacs's keen cerulean gaze was almost hypnotic. Then he softened his tone. "Detective, all you want is Vine behind bars, right? Does it really matter who pounds the nails in his coffin?"

Lainie wasn't sure how to answer. "We had a clear shot" was all she managed, and even to her it sounded weak and pathetic.

Later, after Bucshon was gone, the chief pulled her aside. "Lainie, everyone in the department knows your history with Vine."

"Chief, I—"

He held up a hand. "I know this was a random happening. But your history with Vine is problematic. Good work helps people forget black marks. And your work since your last contact with him has been exemplary. Please don't do anything to refresh people's memories, clear?"

She bit her bottom lip to keep from saying something stupid. What he said was true and wise. "Clear."

Later, when she and Mike were back in her office, Lainie brooded.

"Get over it, Lainie. Why are you taking this so hard?"

"I wanted another crack at Vine. Bucshon seemed like an omen or something. Dropped right into my lap after all this time. Why is the FBI involved anyway? Vine is a Long Beach criminal; he should be arrested by Long Beach cops."

“He was only saying what you wanted to hear. You don’t even know if what Bucshon had to say would have been actionable.”

“If it wasn’t, why did Isaacs swoop in and take him away?”

Mike had no answer and Lainie kept brooding. She busied herself with writing the names *Skiff* and *Charles* on a notepad. Were they first or last names? She logged on to her computer and decided to do some searching. When she came up with nothing on those names, her thoughts turned toward Agent Isaacs.

She wished she had a photo of him to put on her dartboard. Her first official contact with the FBI and she hated the agent she’d met.