

PACIFIC COAST JUSTICE SERIES

NO.

2

ABDUCTED

a new series from veteran police officer

Janice Cantore

PRAISE FOR *ACCUSED*

“Cantore is a former cop, and her experience shows in this wonderful series debut. The characters are well-drawn and believable, and the suspenseful plot is thick with tension. Fans of Lynette Eason, Dee Henderson, or DiAnn Mills and readers who like crime fiction without gratuitous violence and sex will appreciate discovering a new writer.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“Cantore provides a detailed and intimate account of a homicide investigation in an enjoyable read that’s more crime than Christian.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Set in a busy West Coast city, the story’s twists will keep readers eagerly reading and guessing. . . . I enjoyed every chapter. *Accused* is a brisk and action-filled book with enjoyable characters and a good dose of mystery. . . . I look forward to more books in this series.”

MOLLY ANDERSON, www.ChristianBookPreviews.com

“*Accused* was a wonderfully paced, action-packed mystery. . . . [Carly] is clearly a competent detective, an intelligent woman, and a compassionate partner. This is definitely a series I will be revisiting.”

MIN JUNG, FreshFiction.com

“*Accused* by Janice Cantore is full of suspense. Although it is nearly 400 pages, it was a book I just could not put down and could not read each page fast enough!”

KATIE, blog.concertkatie.com

“The plot takes unexpected twists and turns, which quickly grabs the reader’s attention and holds it tightly until the end. . . . The characters are realistic with flaws as well as good qualities, and the author did a marvelous job of weaving a plot so complex that the reader is left wondering who can be trusted right along with Carly.”

E. A. WEST, thewestcorner.wordpress.com

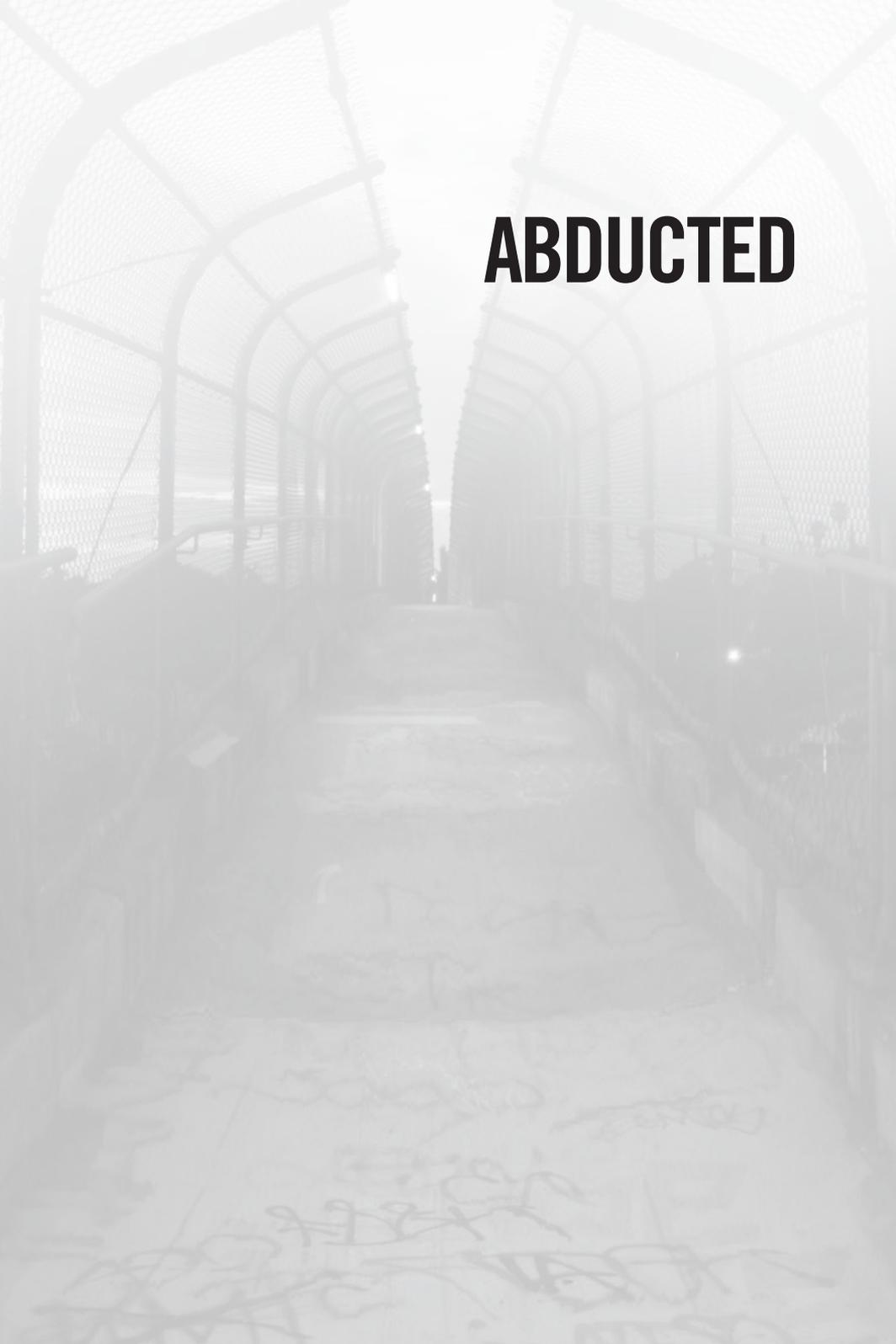
“This was a great read. There was just enough action and mystery to keep me turning page after page. . . . Strong conflict and well-written characters; you won’t want to put this one down!”

mindingspot.blogspot.com

“I started reading this novel and couldn’t put it down. From the beginning of the book to the end, there is action, suspense, crime, red herrings, and thoughts of a spiritual nature. . . . I hope to be able to read more from this author.”

donnalynny23.wordpress.com

ABDUCTED

A long, narrow, covered walkway with a metal mesh roof and concrete floor covered in graffiti. The walkway is flanked by metal railings and extends into the distance, creating a strong sense of perspective. The overall tone is desaturated and somewhat somber.

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Abducted

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1

“I CAN’T BELIEVE it still feels like eighty degrees outside. It’s three o’clock in the morning.” Carly Edwards bit back a yawn and waved one hand outside the patrol car as she drove up Las Playas Boulevard. The smell of hot pavement permeated the air, and Carly squirmed at the feeling of her undershirt plastered to her body under the stiff Kevlar vest.

“What’s the matter? You miss your afternoon shift in juvenile, sitting in air-conditioned comfort?” asked Joe King, her partner, riding shotgun. They’d agreed long ago that the AC was a no-no in the black-and-white while on patrol. Officers needed to hear what was going on outside the car, and that was impossible with the windows up and the AC blowing.

“No way!” She shot a glare at Joe only to find him grinning. “Ha-ha. No matter how hot it gets—or how cold, for that matter—I’ll still love graveyard patrol.”

Joe settled into his seat. “Well, it’s good to have you back. Bet you wish you’d cut your hair. You’re probably hot right now.”

Running a hand behind her neck, Carly nodded. “I wish I had scissors with me.” The hot weather served as a reminder: she needed to cut her hair. No matter how she tied her thick mop back, it was just too hot. She smiled in the semidarkness. *Small price to pay for being back where I want to be.* She turned the car down an alley and slowed, listening and watching while garages and dark backyards rolled by. The radio stayed quiet.

“I was talking to Todd the other day . . .,” Carly said.

“Which one? Todd in detectives or Todd out at the academy?”

“Academy, the department historian. Did you know that back in the thirties and forties, they used to call black-and-whites ‘prowl cars’? Don’t you think that’s a great name? Especially for us working graves. That’s what we do—*prowl*.”

“Yeah, I like that. Prowling for prowlers,” Joe agreed. “Especially this time of the morning—we prowl through empty streets looking for bad guys.”

Carly nodded and checked her watch. “Let’s do some prowling over at Memorial Hospital. The watch report said there was an uptick in car burgs in the hospital lot. I prom-

ised Andrea we'd give the area some extra attention. Maybe we'll get lucky and catch an auto burglar."

"Ah, Andrea the wild woman. Sometimes I wonder how the two of you live together; you're so different."

"So what are you trying to say? I'm boring?" Carly pulled out of the alley and onto a main thoroughfare.

"No, you're just more down-to-earth. You have to admit, Andrea is a player."

"She may be a player, but she's been a good friend. I don't know what I would have done if she hadn't been there for me after the divorce." She shrugged and kept her eyes moving, watching the dark street and quiet businesses. "I've known her since we were five."

Joe grunted. "I'm glad the match works for you."

Carly steered the car toward the hospital and punched the accelerator, enjoying the speed and the empty city streets but distracted by the subject of her roommate. "I will admit, though, there has been some friction between us lately. She's not happy Nick and I are talking about reconciling." Carly frowned and chewed on her bottom lip. *In fact, it seems to make Andrea downright angry.*

"Maybe she's afraid you'll get hurt again."

Carly slowed the unit as they reached the hospital parking lot. She cast a sidelong glance at Joe. He was looking out his window.

"Is it just Andrea who's afraid for me, or does that go for you, too?" She clicked off the headlights and settled into

a five-mile-per-hour crawl through the sparsely filled lot, watching carefully for any movement.

“Yeah, I guess it goes for me, too. I like Nick and everything—he’s a great cop—but I remember how much he hurt you. Are you sure you want to take that chance again?”

Simultaneously they turned to face one another. Carly read the concern in his eyes before she turned back to concentrate on the lot. But instead of seeing cars, she began replaying the first date she’d had with Nick after he was released from the hospital. He’d decided to court her as though they’d just met and to treat her with a respect and tenderness that took her breath away. “I’ll prove I’m a new man, worthy of your trust and admiration, a trust I’ll never betray again,” he’d said just before he kissed her good night. As his lips touched hers, his words warmed her heart and she forgot about all the bad baggage in their history.

“I’ve told you, I believe he’s changed,” Carly said to Joe. “I’ve changed too. We’re Christians now.” She wished the conviction in her voice would infuse her heart. Inside, she winced because Nick had been distant lately. A couple of weeks after that wonderful date, he began pulling away, and she was at a loss as to why. *And we’ve been through so much.* The last sixteen months flashed through Carly’s mind: Nick’s affair, their split, the murder case that brought them back together, and the shooting that left Nick with a gimpy hip.

“Well,” Joe said, “all I know is that Nick is lucky you’ll give him the time of day, let alone a reconciliation.”

“I’d be happy to explain the Christian . . .” Something

caught her eye. She stopped the unit. They were in the last parking row, facing the security building on the fringe of the hospital's property.

"You see something?" Joe shifted forward in his seat.

"Yes, I'm sure I saw a light flash across the window there." She pointed to the left side of the building in front of them.

The pair stared into the darkness at the small, one-story building, the only noise the steady hum of the Chevy's engine and an occasional squeak of leather gear.

"Look! Did you see it?" Carly hissed the question in an excited whisper as her heart rate quickened. She turned the car off.

"I saw it." Joe picked up the radio mike. "Adam-7, show us out at Memorial Hospital, possible burglary in progress in the security offices on the southwest portion of the parking lot."

He replaced the mike, and they both waited to hear the dispatcher acknowledge the transmission. Several units answered to assist. Carly nodded to Joe, and they quietly got out of the car.

"I saw it twice more," she whispered without taking her eyes off the building. "You go north; I'll take south."

They parted and came at the building from different directions, each using the few cars and trees in the lot for cover. As Carly approached the southeast corner, a car parked on the side of the building came into view. The vehicle was tucked away where a vehicle didn't belong, in an enclosure reserved for Dumpsters.

When she cleared the corner of the building, more of the

car became visible, and she could make out a faint silhouette of someone behind the wheel. Frowning, she squinted, trying to see better in the darkness. If there was someone behind the wheel, he or she was short. A kid?

She jerked her radio from its holder. Whoever it was, he didn't belong here, and she could read the license plate.

"Adam-7, there's a car—"

The car's engine roared to life. In a cacophony of grinding gears and squealing tires, it lurched backward, straight for Carly.

"Carly!" Joe called her name as she dove into a planter, out of the car's path but still close enough to feel its exhaust as the driver ground the gears into first and screeched forward, away from the lot. Carly fumbled for her radio while Joe ran to her side.

She held a hand up to indicate she was okay and keyed her radio to hail dispatch. "Adam-7, we have a possible burglary suspect fleeing from our location, now northbound on California Ave. It's a small, gray, compact vehicle, license plate 3-Tom-King-Adam-4-6-3."

The taillights sped north toward the freeway.

"Are you okay?" Joe leaned down to help her out of the bushes.

"Yeah, just a few scratches." Carly brushed her uniform off and found no significant damage, only a muddy knee.

The sound of sirens split the air, and the radio told them assisting units had picked up the fleeing vehicle and were now in pursuit.

“I hope they get him,” Carly sighed, more than a little disappointed they weren’t in a car speeding after the burglar. She jerked a thumb toward the building and spoke in a soft tone to Joe. “Whoever had the light on in there did not have time to get in that car.”

Joe nodded in agreement. “Let’s finish checking the building.”

Carly kept one ear tuned to the pursuit on the radio while she and Joe turned their attention to the security building.

“Look.” Joe pointed with one hand and drew his weapon with the other. There was a screen on the ground under an open window. If someone had climbed into the building through this window, then that person was still inside.

The partners lowered the volume on their radios. Carly drew her gun and stepped to one side of the garbage enclosure while Joe took the other end.

From her position she had a clear view of the window. Patiently she watched. Joe was closer to the building, and she could see him straining to hear if there was someone moving around inside. In a few minutes their vigilance was rewarded, and Joe signaled her that he’d heard something. Carly tightened the grip on her gun.

A bag appeared in the window. Gloved hands shoved the bag out. It dropped to the ground and landed softly near the screen.

Carly looked at Joe and held a finger to her lips. They both trained their weapons on the opening. A man poked his head out the window and looked to the left and the right.

Carly held her breath, but she knew she and Joe were well concealed. The man then pushed his entire torso out the window. Head down, he twisted and swung his legs to the left out the long, thin opening. With a push, a little twist, and a whispered curse, the burglar let go of the sill and dropped the short distance to the ground next to the bag. His back was to Carly and Joe, and when he turned, Joe made their presence known.

“Police! Keep your hands where we can see them.” Their flashlights pinned the man in strong, bright light.

The burglar jumped and raised his hands in the air. “Don’t shoot; don’t shoot! I got nothing!”

Carly sensed a combination of fear and surprise in the man’s voice. *He thought we’d left to chase his buddy.*

Two assisting units roared into the lot, and the area was awash in more light from both headlights and spotlights. Joe and Carly took the man into custody. Carly led him to their patrol car while Joe contacted hospital security to open the building so they could conduct a thorough search.

Sweat poured down the crook’s face. He smelled like a noxious mixture of cigarettes and dirty sweat socks. She leaned him against the patrol car and emptied his pockets on the hood on the off chance there was something from the security offices on his person. All she found was a filthy nylon wallet, a pack of cigarettes, a lighter, and some change. Once certain he wasn’t in possession of anything else, she seated him in the back of the unit. Next, she emptied the contents of the bag he’d thrown out the window. Turning on

the spotlight, she illuminated everything and surveyed what the thief had seen fit to steal.

The bag was full of papers, spreadsheets. Carly frowned, muttering, “This makes no sense.” There were no valuable trinkets, just papers with names and times. As she read more carefully, she saw that the sheets were schedules outlining the strength and positioning of hospital security personnel. She looked back at the crook in the car, and he looked away. He was a skinny, dirty man with the ruined teeth of a speed freak. Carly opened his wallet and retrieved a driver’s license. His name was Stanley Harper, and he was thirty years old, a resident of Las Playas.

She sat in the passenger seat of the patrol car and keyed Stanley’s information into the computer to check for warrants. Her search brought up two hits.

“Mr. Harper, did you know you have two outstanding traffic warrants?” Carly spoke to the man through the custody cage, looking over her left shoulder while she talked. “And you just got off parole for—surprise of surprises—burglary. Doesn’t look like you’ve learned your lesson.”

“I ain’t saying nothing. I want to call my lawyer.”

Carly flinched at words she hated to hear. Now she couldn’t ask him about the spreadsheets.

“You know the drill. As soon as you’re processed, you can call Santa Claus if you want.”

“My lawyer will do. I’ll be out before you finish your paperwork.”

