

About the Author

Ines Gray is an American paranormal romance author who resides in the United States Midwest. She has worked in federal law enforcement for nearly twenty years. Since 1998, the scope of her duties included expository writing. She transitioned to fiction writing in 2022, and *Angel Redeemed* is her first novel. She plans to write as many books as possible about angels, demons, and shifters blending into the modern world. She loves to travel, loves action and horror movies, and of course, loves paranormal romance.

Angel Redeemed
Watchers and Warriors Series: Book I

Ines Gray

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Vanguard Press

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Dedication

To my daughter and husband for supporting my many creative endeavors.

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Chapter One

For at least the fifth time, Devin's fingertips grazed the wad of cash in her pocket. Her heart raced, and perspiration beaded along her hairline. It was a hunter's high. A coworker once told her novice hunters experience a rush of adrenaline when first sighting their game. He called it buck fever. So, what if she wasn't a novice? And who cared if the current hunting ground lay inside a dive bar in downtown Kansas City? She had it. Buck fever. And Baby Boi was the key to finding her buck. She sucked in a deep breath and pushed through the weathered door of Club Winter.

The shithole was dim. Perfect for remaining covert. AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" pulsed around her, emerging from a 1950s jukebox sitting in the corner.

How fitting.

She sniffed, cringed, and covered her nose. If despair had a smell, it was this. Liquor mixed with BO, musty damp air, and a few unnamed smells she'd rather leave that way. The acrid stench made her eyes water.

Sidestepping a pile of what looked like the former contents of someone's stomach, Devin squinted and stalked the length of the room, soon realizing her CI was nowhere to be found. *Dammit. I'm late.*

Her fingers drummed along the high back of a barstool. Now what? Firefly dust motes swirled through pockets of sunlight and fell to the stained concrete floor. The club looked virtually empty this time of day. Aside from the one red-eyed businessman slouched at the end of the bar and... *hell no!* She just made eye contact.

"Need a drink, prec-i-ous?" The stranger, a regular she assumed, lifted a short glass of amber liquid in a universal *cheers* salute, sloshing some over the rim.

She groaned, suppressing an eye roll. Yet, the whisper of an expletive escaped her lips. "For fuck's sake."

The classic signs of one too many flowed off him. Thankfully, the drunk resembled a gambler with a bad poker face. Slurred speech and

impaired coordination gave him away. Not wanting to draw further attention, she shook her head, kept quiet, and crossed the room until she found the back door, not yet ready to give up the hunt.

Devin ducked into the alley. The steel door closed with a thud behind her, amplified by the silence of the narrow gangway. A hasty glance to the left and then to the right located no one. But apparently, she'd stepped into a Wes Craven horror movie. From a street vent, vapor rose before her like an ethereal spirit. The back of her neck prickled. Now would be the time a fictional dream demon leaned over a shoulder to whisper something clever before slashing her flesh with finger blades. She smirked, shook her head, then shuddered when said finger blades fluttered along her spine.

Stepping away from the nonexistent phantom, Devin scanned the base of the historic brick walls once more, seeing no one. Her hands lifted then fell, followed by a string of expletives creative enough to make her Catholic father blush. On the verge of admitting defeat, movement to her left caught in her peripheral. Letting the burning smell of tobacco lead her, she rotated her head. Thankfully, it wasn't Freddy Krueger.

Baby Boi leaned against the back-alley wall. A Marlboro hung from his bottom lip. Before settling his gaze on her, he sucked in a deep drag and wiped a hand across the black apron tied to his waist.

"He likes to be whipped." Baby exhaled. A white dragon plume rolled out of his mouth and over his lips. He swept a tuft of long blonde hair out of his eyes, tucking it behind one ear.

Devin canted her head. Baby hadn't aged well. The nickname earned from his once youthful features now seemed misleading.

"So what?" She flicked lint from her rolled-up sleeve. "Why do I care what his kinks are? I just want to know where to find him." *And gross.* The thought of Ross, a sixty-two-year-old man, being whipped for sexual gratification was unsettling. *Thanks for the visual, Baby.*

He grinned. "Patience is a virtue, Deputy." His shoulders lifted, then fell. "Or some shit like that. If you had any, you'd realize I'm getting ready to tell you why."

Pausing to take another dramatic drag, Baby gave her a side-eye.

She kicked out a hip, folding both arms across her chest. Clenching her teeth, she forced herself to wait—something she'd always struggled with.

Damn him for being right.

The corners of Baby's lips twitched. "He was here, but he took off to Amarillo late yesterday to his favorite BDSM club, The Triple X." Another pause to take yet another drag. Devin bit the inside of her cheek. "He'll be there Monday night, about seven p.m. A dominatrix named Dominique, whom he prefers, works there."

Devin's eyes narrowed. She prowled closer to Baby. "Are you positive he'll be there?"

He shot her a look that told her not to question him. "I know Ross. He'll be there." Pushing off the wall, he threw the cigarette to the ground and then stepped on it, snuffing out the fiery red tobacco. "I worked with him for two years. I wasn't always this down-and-out."

The under-eye circles and deep wrinkles revealed a map of Baby's downfall. At one time, he'd been Ross's protégé. Which meant he knew Ross and was accurate. She wanted him on her payroll. And for some reason, he'd always been loyal to her as a CI when he'd talk to no one else.

Again, her fingers grazed the wad of bills. A momentary pang of reluctance seized her. Strange. She hadn't experienced empathy in years. Yet, something about Baby's appearance gnawed at her. He was thin. Too thin.

Chewing her bottom lip, withholding the money crossed her mind. Either she refused to support his habit, or she kept his trust. After a few moments of the internal conflict, the latter won out. Sighing, she pulled the cash from her pocket.

"I hope you're buying a burger with this, Baby." The underlying accusation hung between them. If the subsequent blue-eyed glare was any indication, he had no plans to purchase food. She acquiesced, letting out a low grumble, "Remember, Baby, we never saw each other today." Pinning him with her best expression of intimidation, she dropped the cash in his outstretched hand.

"Saw who, Deputy?" He pocketed the money and disappeared inside Club Winter.

Fifteen minutes later, Devin crossed the Missouri River into Jackson County for her second clandestine meeting of the day. The murky water

glittered under the rays of the low-hanging sun. Baby's words replayed like an earworm in her head.

Monday night. Seven p.m.

She blew out a dramatic sigh. "I'm full-on corrupt now." Vega would fire her if he knew about either meeting. The possibility of losing her job should twist her gut in a knot. It didn't. Vengeance freed her from a two-year prison of grief. Now that she had a taste for it, she wasn't going back.

Four months ago, the empty organ beneath her breastbone kick-started again. The corners of her lips twitched. Like a prisoner escaping Alcatraz, she was nearly to the shore. Hopefully, she'd reach it before the angry swells dragged her under.

With expert precision, Devin eased the Jeep into a parking space marked for LEOs. She pushed the gear shift into park, checked the visor mirror, and wiped away the beaded layer of sweat forming along her upper lip. The air could be cut with a knife. The meager eighty-eight degrees registered closer to ninety-five, thanks to the dew point.

Snapping the visor shut, she leaned back in the bucket seat, staring at the county medical examiner's office, chewing on a thumb nail, dimly, aware of the bad habit.

A knot formed in her stomach. She longed for the feeling of indifference that Claire's workplace once held. Now, the simple sight of the mundane structure threatened to cause her to break into a cold sweat.

How pathetic. Two years had passed, and still, she had the same reaction.

Oh hell. Here it comes. Hot acidic liquid rose in her throat. Leaning forward, resting her forehead against the steering wheel, she sucked in several deep breaths. When it seemed the breathing exercise worked, her cell phone rang, triggering the blurry line between past and present. Claire's call from two years ago, the call received at two-thirty in the morning, the call she'd worked hard to forget, crashed back like a rookie's Billy club upside her head.

"Richard's been in an accident, Dee. I need you to come down here now. It's urgent."

Devin sucked in more air, working hard to fight the memory. "I don't need this. Not now." She grimaced, glancing sideways at her purse. "Please stop," she begged the latest model iPhone immersed in its depths. It obeyed

and fell silent. Bringing a fist to her forehead, Devin willed the memory to go away.

Too late. The quicksand surrounded her.

“Just fucking tell me what happened, Claire!” Her voice pitched up, too loud for Claire’s soft tone.

The subsequent silence following Claire’s pause proved torturous. “Dee... come down here now.” The stark realization that Claire hung up hit her like a roundhouse to the gut, stealing the breath from her lungs.

Devin shook her head, attempting to clear the memory. Her shattered heart had begun to heal. But every time she tried returning to this place, it felt as though someone punched through her chest, ripped out her heart, and squeezed air from her lungs. Sutures were torn away, leaving a new gaping wound.

She forced her eyelids open. The taut skin across her knuckles had gone white. With a hard swallow, she willed herself to release the steering wheel, then wiped clammy palms down the front of her Levi’s.

“Relax.” She inhaled on the word, a practiced grounding technique. Letting the breath out, she struggled to find her center. Until the earworm spoke again, the tone more sinister this time.

Monday night. Seven p.m.

Devin’s spine straightened. The corners of her mouth flattened, and her gaze distanced. *This is for Richard.* With a slow deliberate movement, she pushed loose hair from her face and ran a hand to the tip of her long braid. Snatching the credentials identifying her as a Deputy US Marshal, she climbed out of the Jeep, the movements rigid. With a stride more confident than she felt, she crossed the parking lot, heading for the front door.

“Afternoon, Deputy.”

Devin nodded to the building’s security officer. He glanced at the badge in her outstretched hand, then flicked a finger, signaling her to continue. The metal detector buzzed, alerting everyone to the firearm concealed beneath her plaid button-down.

Operating on autopilot, she made her way to the area of the building that housed the autopsy division and Claire’s office. The clean white walls and initial smell of antiseptic teased her senses into believing the surroundings were akin to a hospital. But the lingering smell of cold death hung in the air, never letting her forget where she truly was.

The thin lines of past and present again intertwined as she traveled the narrow length of a hall. Feeling as though she floated above her body, she followed the same path she walked two years ago. One she'd managed to avoid all this time. Until today.

Devin watched herself turn right, descend a small flight of stairs, pass the employee exit, then turn again to descend a second flight of stairs. At Claire's door, she hesitated. An unwelcome tremor thrummed through her hand as it hovered above the handle. The memory of Richard's lifeless body lying on an examination table flashed like the snap of a digital camera.

She dragged in a breath of air to push down the bile. "This is for him." Her shoulders lifted as she forced the tidal wave of emotion aside.

At eleven minutes past four, she entered Claire's office.

Chapter Two

“You’re late!” Claire sat ramrod straight at her desk in the middle of the room, pointing a fork at Devin as if it were a shaming finger. She lowered the utensil, stabbed at something green in her bowl, then lifted it to her mouth and raised a brow.

How many months had passed since she’d last seen Claire? The intimidation attempt clashed with the fun-natured woman she knew Claire to be. Devin nearly laughed out loud, despite the emotional tornado brewing within.

“Got stuck in traffic.” Devin choked on the lie. Working hard to corral unstable emotions, she plopped down in the chair opposite Claire. “Sorry.”

Grumbling through a mouthful of romaine, Claire straightened her shoulders. “Lucky for you, I was hungry.” She went back to digging at the array of mixed greens. “I decided to eat my lunch while waiting.” Devin stole a glance at the clock on the wall. Claire pushed out a hefty sigh. “Yep. It’s been busy. We’re short-staffed, so I’m eating lunch at four o’clock.”

Scrutinizing her hangry friend across the paper-strewn desk, Devin again suppressed the genuine laugh threatening to bubble up. Claire’s finely freckled nose, along with the high ponytail, resembled an eight-year-old girl scolding her dollies for wetting their panties. It bordered on comical.

Claire glanced up from the meal, narrowing her gaze and wrinkling her petite nose. “Something funny?”

“Nope.” Devin lied again, unable to completely straighten the corners of her mouth. Apparently, hunger and a busy day meant no room to joke around. Outside the morgue, Claire made it her life’s mission to have fun, but here she turned into Jack Nicholson. All work and no play made Claire a dull girl.

“Well,” Claire huffed, ignoring the smirk, “we can talk about what lies waiting for you in the other room while I finish here. Sound good?”

“Yep.” Devin propped her elbows on the silver-topped desk. “So, what does lie waiting for me in the other room? I know you said on the phone

that you think you have a new victim. Tell me why you think it's Ross." She rested her chin atop her entwined fingers. "I'm all ears."

Claire peered at her over the fork, remaining silent for several moments, before laying the utensil down and wiping her mouth with a napkin. Leaning in across the desk, one conspirator to the other, she spoke in a low tone, as if someone were listening. "Okay, Dee, here's what I have." Claire jerked a thumb in the direction of the autopsy room. "Three John Does. Not one of them had a single piece of identification. No dental records, according to the forensic odontologist, and no fingerprint records."

Devin cinched her brow. "Hmm. None of them had dental records. Interesting."

"Tell me about it, and they were all found in the same vicinity, so it's probably fair to assume their deaths are connected, right?"

"Possibly, but you know what they say about assumptions."

"Yeah, yeah. Ass, you, me, yadda, yadda." Claire waved a dismissive hand in the air, then smacked it on the table. "But I have at least three other reasons to believe so."

Adrenaline triggered by intrigue surged through Devin's veins. "Were all three murdered?"

"Nope. At least not in the sense of Ross's work. One died from a fall. I believe the third one died from blunt force trauma to the cranium, either prior to or during the fall. I haven't had time to examine all three." Tipping her head up, Claire glanced at the autopsy room. "Of course, the other two could have been pushed." She shrugged. "So far, I've only had time to look at Johnny number one, at length. On the surface, he's the one who looks like the result of Ross's handiwork."

"Stabbed in the heart?" Devin inclined her head.

"Well, impaled would be more accurate." Claire threw an arm out across the desk, mimicking a stabbing motion with her pen. "All the way through with every bit ripped out." She brought the pen back to her torso in one fluid movement.

Ross believed in the supernatural, vampires specifically. A symptom of his schizophrenia. Devin knew this thing between her and the fugitive had become an unhealthy obsession. If Vega knew about today's meetings... well, at the very least, Claire would receive the ass-chewing of a lifetime from Phil, and Devin would lose her job. Still, that knowledge didn't stop her from pressing forward.

“So, what about the other two Johnnies?”

Claire shoved out her chair and stood. “Put on the gear, and we’ll go have a look. It’s better if you see for yourself why I suspect their deaths are connected.”

Chapter Three

Devin stood and walked across the white room housing a collection of seafoam-green furniture to retrieve an extra hospital gown stashed nearby. After slipping into the lightweight garment, she donned a mask, cap, goggles, slipped on shoe coverings, and snapped on two latex gloves, mirroring Claire's attire.

A bitter taste rose in her mouth. She despised this part. The smell in the next room always absorbed into her hair, her skin, and her nasal cavities. Even after a hot shower and a lot of scrubbing with a thick loofah, the stench of death somehow lingered.

Devin cringed and steeled herself for the sight she was about to see. For more than two years, she'd managed to avoid this room. Only a desire to get her hands on Ross motivated her rubbery legs forward. She closed her eyes for a moment, then exhaled and pushed through the door, following Claire into the autopsy suite where three nude males awaited on cold metal slabs.

The temperature dropped as they crossed the sally port's threshold. Claire pushed aside the body lift on the way to John Doe number one, stopping near his head. Despite his grayish hue and swollen face, covered in pooled contusions, he'd been attractive. In addition to the open wound in his chest, his right wrist hung unnaturally from the rest of his arm. "How old?"

"I estimate about twenty-eight, judging by muscle tone and teeth recession. According to the tox report, he was very healthy. No drugs and no disease."

"So, in other words, aside from the gaping wound in his chest and getting the shit beat out of him, Johnny One was in great shape and in his prime."

"Yep. There's one interesting fact about him, though, and it's not exclusive to him. All three of these guys have an unusual amount of..."

“Scars,” Devin interrupted. She scanned the three dead men. Their numerous scars were evident, but only because they were bare.

“Yes. That’s the first reason I think these guys knew each other. Second, Johnny One has broken a lot of bones throughout his life span. Although I haven’t fully examined the other two, they probably have the same anomaly.”

“What makes you think that?”

Claire moved to tap her lip the way she did when critically thinking, but apparently thought better of it since she wore protective gear. “Well, the other two fell off a building. At a glance, you can tell number two is a jumbled mess of broken bones. Number three, not so much, but it looks like he did break some bones on his way down.”

Zeroing in on Johnny One, Devin listened intently to Claire’s assessment. He had thirty-one scars. His heart had been ripped out after a thorough ass beating.

At a quick glance, the other two had just as many scars, if not more. *Damn!* Especially number two. Devin wrinkled her nose, unnerved by the amount of pain the men must have suffered. Although she had no current basis of fact for it, she agreed with Claire. Somehow, all three men were linked. If by nothing else, by their pain and suffering.

Claire moved to the second dead man. “See this?” Her finger stilled on several round scars located above the second cadaver’s right pectoral. “These look like old buckshot wounds.” Still pointing, she traveled to a concave section of his torso. “Broken ribs. A new injury.” Then to a scar located at the top of his left thigh. “Knife wound. Old. Or more like...” She rolled him on his side, motioning for Devin to stand next to her. Claire pointed to the back of the same thigh to a matching scar “... a sword or something.”

“Sword? That’s an odd weapon choice.”

“You’d think so, but they brought in what looks like an old sword, with one of the bodies. Whatever instrument caused this scar, somebody stuck it all the way through.”

Devin winced. A bond jumper once cut her with a switchblade years ago. He’d managed to pull the knife from his waistband and slice her while she attempted to administer cuffs. The thought of being impaled by such a long blade sent a rippling chill down her spine. “Damn, whoever these guys

were, they must have lived life on the edge. And, seriously, who the hell carries around a sword?"

"Bodyguards, cops, criminals, thrill seekers?" Claire threw out suggestions.

"Maybe." Devin nodded; her gaze glued to the second dead man. "But cops or criminals would have fingerprint records, and I doubt any cop carries around a sword. Not when guns are readily available."

"Reason number three is right here." Claire tapped an odd-looking tribal tattoo on the second cadaver's shoulder. "All three have this tattoo."

Devin snapped her head up, meeting Claire's aquamarine gaze. Her jaw fell open. "Seriously?"

"Yep." Claire raised her eyebrows and crossed both arms over her chest, a look of satisfaction plastered on her face. "Now tell me I'm just making an assumption, Miss Smart Ass."

Oh, she knew when to keep her mouth shut. A wide grin evolved across her face. She gave a low whistle. "Girl, I love you!"

After wiping the self-satisfied look off her face, Claire's expression turned serious. "It looks like a serpent or dragon biting its own tail, doesn't it? Do you suppose they belonged to a gang or cult?"

"Maybe. They're a little old for a gang, though. Most outgrow it, even if the mentality remains." Devin leaned in, getting a closer look at the circular tattoo. Using a gloved finger, she traced along the strange symbol. "A cult is possible. Hell, if Ross was after them, maybe these guys really were vampires." Devin released a low chuckle, her smile broadening when she met Claire's gaze.

Claire's eyes narrowed. Beneath the mask, a classic *let's get serious* look surfaced. "Yeah, right. Let's continue with my assessment of number two."

Devin gave her a curt nod. "Okay." *No play. Dull girl.*

Claire cocked her head. "He looks older than the other two, huh? Like I said, his fall resulted in several broken bones, which were easy to assess at a quick glance." Her finger moved to below the knee. "He also has a compound fracture of the right tibia and a broken spinal cord. He wasn't quite as lucky..."

Claire's voice trailed off to a drone as Devin's gaze lifted to Johnny Three. Unsure why, she found him more intriguing. She sidestepped,

closing the distance to the third table, while listening to Claire rattle off the list of Number Two's broken body parts. Within seconds, Claire joined her, both now flanking Johnny Three.

"John Doe number three landed on a ledge of the building. His fall was shorter than number two. Only his left scapula and left humerus bones were broken. I don't think it was the fall that killed him. It was a blow to his head here." Claire placed her hand on the third cadaver's chin, gently but stiffly rolled his head to the side, and pointed to a dried bloody patch of hair on the back side of his skull. "Like I said, I haven't fully examined these two yet."

Fixated on the third dead man, something tugged at the corners of Devin's memory. A faint hum pulsed through her ears. The closer she leaned toward the body, the more she felt certain the pulsing vibration also skimmed her flesh. Like charged electricity. *Weird*. She glanced around the room, looking for the source. A flickering fluorescent light, an overloaded outlet, or a failing circuit breaker. Nothing stood out.

Devin straightened, furrowed her brow, and stared at the cadaver. A sudden realization struck her. Somehow, she knew this man, a crazy thought she dismissed because he was, in fact, a stranger. Still, why did he look familiar?

Johnny Three looked homeless. As though he lived on the street for years. His long, dark hair fell to the middle of his back. It was unkempt, knotted, and ratty. A full beard and mustache covered his face. Her gaze skimmed down his body, stopping on rough, calloused hands. He'd be at least six feet tall standing. Probably taller. There, on his left pectoral muscle, just above the nipple, was the same tribal tattoo. One of many tattoos. Most of which covered his shoulders and the length of both arms. She scanned each, looking for a connection to a gang, seeing none.

Something deep within Devin stirred. Every new detail she absorbed felt like a turn in a labyrinth, bringing her closer to an answer.

Her breaths shortened.

Somehow... she did know this man, though she'd never met him. Unease seized her.

Nightmares plagued Devin for months following Richard's death. Most of that time had been spent awaking from troubled, intermittent sleep. In the past year, those nightmares lessened to few and far between. But now,

looking down at the third dead man, the faint memory of a nightmare she experienced the night before flitted like the wings of a butterfly at the corners of her memory—an overwhelming feeling of *déjà vu*. On the verge of realization, a pair of snapping fingers appeared in front of her face, forcing her gaze upward.

“Dee, what’s the matter with you? Are you sick or something?” Claire’s fingers snapped again. “Jesus, Dee. Are you listening to me? I’m not talking for my health here!”

Claire’s wide, blue piercing glare came into focus with a tinge of annoyance and the classic one-raised eyebrow.

“Y-yes, of course, I’m listening. I just thought... this one looks familiar to me. I just can’t place the face. I’ll remember eventually.” Devin decided not to elaborate.

A wide grin replaced Claire’s annoyed features. “Well, good. That would be a great lead. Let me know when you recall who he is. Then I can at least put a name to the face.” Claire placed a hand in the small of Devin’s back and guided, or more like pushed her toward the door. “Maybe then I can link the other two dead Johnnies. For now, we need to go. Phil will have my ass in a sling if he knows I’m showing you these guys.”

A moment before Claire ushered her out of the room, a Nordic wave of emotion shot through Devin. Complete and utter loneliness invaded her body as if she were picking it up clairvoyantly. Without warning, her knees buckled. She went down as if she’d been poleaxed, grabbing hold of an empty gurney to keep from falling into a heap on the floor. Luckily, the brake was engaged, or she may have rolled away with it.

Claire grasped her elbow, rushing around to face her, clutching the other arm, and caging her. “Dee! You okay? Your pupils are dilated.” Claire followed with a sound of disgust deep in her throat. “Hmm, you look flushed. Just a minute ago, you were pale.” She ripped off one glove, pressing the back of a hand to Devin’s forehead. “No fever, but you feel a little warm.”

“I’m okay.” Devin forced out the lie through clenched teeth, pushing herself to a standing position, forcing Claire to loosen her grip. Lifting a finger to her temple, she shook her head. What was the sudden emotional breakdown? Her gaze lifted to Claire’s expression of concern. Embarrassment filled her. She never wore emotions on her sleeve. This had

to be a subconscious response to visiting the last place she'd seen her dead husband.

Right?

Devin opened her mouth, more lies on the tip of her tongue, when the humming vibration in her ears abruptly intensified, nearly deafening her. She snapped her mouth shut and narrowed her eyes, scanning the room, looking for the source. Still nothing. Wanting more than anything to leave rather than investigate the mains hum, she dismissed it and waved her hand in a nonchalant gesture. With a hard swallow, she repeated, "I'm okay. I'll be fine."

They moved into Claire's office. Removing the green gown, Devin eyed Claire, who, in turn, eyed her with a furrowed brow. "Dee, I really don't think..."

Thinking fast, she cut Claire off and lifted the corners of her mouth. "Hey, guess what? I finally moved all my things to the new house." She held up her hands and spread her fingers, hoping the change of subject would work. "I'm officially moved. Let me give you the house number."

Devin darted across the room to grab a pen and notepad from Claire's desk, then jotted down the landline. "Of course, my cell is the same, but if you need to reach me at home, here's the new number. The cell service is terrible on the lake, so I got a house phone, too." After a moment's thought, she jotted down the new address. She and Claire had been friends a long time—since high school and roommates in undergrad. She might have placed an emotional wedge between family and friends over the past two years, but she wanted a return to normalcy. Prove she'd be available if needed. She returned the pad with the information to Claire's desk.

Claire gave her a white toothy smile. "Okay, Dee, thanks." Her features softened. "I want you to go home and get some rest now. It's almost five. Your shift is over. Since tomorrow is Saturday, your instructions are to sleep in. Doctor's orders." Claire's eyes narrowed. She pointed one slender manicured finger. "I mean it, Dee. Call me tomorrow to assure me you're okay."

Devin retrieved her credentials, raised a dramatic gaze to the ceiling, and laughed. "Okay, whatever you say, Doc." She emphasized the last word. "I'll take two aspirin and call you in the morning." Rotating on a heel

to leave, Devin glanced over a shoulder. “Hey, can you get whatever is making that humming noise fixed? The vibration is driving me crazy.”

Claire cocked her head, listening for a moment. Her brow wrinkled. “I think you’re hearing things, Dee. Nothing is humming.”