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Ettinger, the gangly cardiologist and their joint expert witness, rose and gathered his file.

“Explain and teach,” Stern counseled, “but make the jury think being a doctor is damn hard. If they think medical decisions are easy, they can second-guess.”

“I can honestly say this is a judgment call, if the man’s signs were properly recorded by the nurses. I would’ve ordered an echo, but with carriers screaming about costs, I can see why a guy might wait for more symptoms.”

Stern handed the doctor his coat. “If Bragg wants to call Galway and Kristen’s nurses liars, let him. All he’s got is a diary written by a greedy widow.”

The cardiologist turned to Kristen. “And you’ll start me on the nurses?”

“Yes, Doctor. We go first, then Michael.”

“You two look wrung out,” Ettinger said.

Stern nodded. “It’s been a long ol’ day. If he asks if you know me socially, tell him every doctor needs to know Mr. Stern these days, with all the frivolous lawsuits being filed.”

“Got it. Nothing about golf.” The doctor said good night and shuffled out.

“Good job tonight, kiddo,” Stern said.

Kristen remained slumped in the conference room chair. “I’m totally wasted,” she said. “Can I spend the night here? Then I could make sure you don’t meet with *our* expert in the morning.” She smiled and stretched her feet under the table, searching for her shoes.

“If you’re like me, once you hit the sack, you’ll be trying the case in your head all night.”

“I’ve got pills.”

He dropped into the chair next to her and reached for her ankle. She started to jerk back, but her reflexes were slow.

He pulled her foot up to his lap. "This is better than a pill."

She found herself perplexed, unsure why she wasn't rejecting him, and curious where this was leading. She was too intrigued—and tired—to retreat.

Stern stroked the ball of her foot with his thumbs, then kneaded the soft underside, and rounded off at the heel. He pulled her short crew sock off. "Good-looking foot. High arch, straight toes. Too wide for an aristocrat though. But I guess Joan was a country girl."

She was glad she had treated herself to a pedicure before the trial.

He worked up each toe, caressing, squeezing, then gently pulling. Finishing at the notch of the Achilles tendon, he made circles with both hands around her ankle. Taking the other foot, he began anew.

Her eyelids grew heavy. Sensations of pleasure migrated up to her brain, circled there, and delightfully lingered. He gave her foot a final squeeze and eased it to the floor.

Stern rose, but she felt nailed to the conference chair. He stepped behind her, squeezed her shoulders, and began working her tight trapezius muscles with his thumbs.

Helpless under his hands, her chin collapsed to her chest.

Stern's fingers crawled into her hair and massaged her scalp, deadening her senses to the world. There was no trial, no worry over who was going to screw whom.

Just as she would have succumbed to anything, Stern stepped around, took her hand, and pulled her to her feet. "Big day tomorrow."

He'd spoken just above a whisper. His fingers lingered, tangled with hers.

Her heartbeat quickened. Was he moving closer? His lips looked delicious.

*Kiss me. What are you waiting for?*

Her breath halted.

He moved no nearer.

She told herself to forget it.

*Get real. He's married. And you're crazy.*

She grabbed her sneakers and socks from the floor, putting them on while sneaking a glance to see if he was disappointed.

Stern, seeming unperturbed by the close call, picked up her briefcase. "I'll walk you down."

When they reached her car, parked near his Benz, she fumbled her keys onto the concrete.

Stern retrieved them, tapped the lock button, and opened the door. "We'll get 'em tomorrow."

Perhaps it was the beer, the camaraderie, the rub, or just the years of deprivation, but suddenly she felt insanely assertive. She touched his shoulder, leaned forward, and stood tiptoe. Feeling petite, she brushed her lips across his. To her astonishment, he backed up, smiled, and said good-bye.

Kristen got in, started her BMW, put it in gear, and looked back one last time. His expression puzzled her. No studly grin. Rather, he appeared thoughtful. She hadn't kissed that many men, but all had responded positively.

*Probably plotting when to turn on me.*