

INQUISITOR OF WITCHES

Written by

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C O N T A C T S

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FADE IN:

EXT. RANCH - NIGHT

Demonic sounds fill the night.

DETECTIVE HELEN THANOS (30) follows her flashlight beam on a trail through large oak trees to a crime scene up ahead. The mood is darker than the night.

Police tape encircles several oaks with a woman's body hanging from a central tree.

A female Medical Examiner, JANE (40), in blue PPE (scrubs), waits patiently for Helen to throw on scrubs and gloves.

Two CSI Team members in white PPE take photos.

HELEN

What do we have, Jane?

JANE

Hi, Helen. Facial ID search matched quickly to Suzi Martin from Missing Persons, 3 days ago.

HELEN

Who called it in?

JANE

A ranch hand, Tod Stevens, was looking for a lost goat. He's waiting for you back at his truck.

HELEN

There were no trucks on the road where I parked. Did you get an ID? Him or the truck?

Jane looks around nervously.

JANE

It was dark. He was panicking. I was in a hurry to call it in. You know this is a stone's throw from the Spahn Movie Ranch site, Charles Manson's old stomping grounds. It gives me the creeps just knowing that -- and that was 60 years ago! Sorry.

Helen remains calm and looks all around the ground.

HELEN

I don't blame you.

JANE

I started shaking when I heard the location.

HELEN

It's no coincidence!

(beat)

Huh? And no purse, car keys, or phone. That's odd.

JANE

Three of us looked, but didn't find anything.

HELEN

Preliminary TOD?

JANE

The time of death is confusing. About seven hours based on body temp and rigor mortis, but the rope strangulation marks look more recent -- four hours.

HELEN

So she was dead a few hours before she supposedly hung herself?

JANE

Preliminary -- I could be wrong.

HELEN

I'll trust you to help with the autopsy tomorrow. I'd better be able to find the ranch hand later. Did you notify the Chief?

JANE

Bad news travels fast. The CSI boys got here in ten minutes; you got here in twenty. The Chief is on his way, he told Councilwoman Martin, and you can bet reporters won't be too far behind.

Jane turns to the CSI team.

HELEN

Did you see the truck or the driver when you arrived?

They shake their heads, "No."

HELEN (CONT'D)

Did you get sufficient photos? We need to get the vic down and covered up before the vultures get here.

The CSI Team gives her a thumbs up.

JANE

I was waiting to show you something.

Jane walks to the back of the vic and shines her flashlight on the thumbs of the victim, which are smashed and covered in dried blood.

HELEN

Her thumbs look like they were put in a vice grip! And, what's with the peasant dress?

JANE

I don't know, but the poor thing was tortured.

HELEN

Okay, cut her down, and let's get her covered.

The Detective whispers to the CSI Team as they cut down the victim.

HELEN (CONT'D)

No one says a word to the Chief or Councilwoman. And definitely not the press!

Helen sees two flashlights approaching, with a half-dozen camera lights thirty yards downslope.

Helen ducks under the yellow tape to stop the CHIEF (male, 60) and sobbing Councilwoman BEVERLY MARTIN (50).

HELEN (CONT'D)

Chief, Councilwoman Martin, I'm so sorry. I'd like to speak with you right here in a moment after I send the vultures back to the road.

Helen screams down at approaching reporters.

HELEN (CONT'D)

This is a restricted area on private land. Please return to the road. That's an order. Any violators will be arrested for trespassing and impeding an investigation!

The lights keep coming.

Helen removes her pistol and fires a shot in the air. BAM.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Or shot!

The lights turn around.

Beverly Martin looks at the body being covered up and SCREAMS.

BEVERLY MARTIN

It's Suzi! Oh my God, It's Suzi.

The Chief hugs and consoles her.

BEVERLY MARTIN (CONT'D)

I knew from the photo, but I didn't believe it.

Helen glares at Jane and the Chief and returns to the Councilwoman and Chief.

HELEN

Sorry for the gunshot. We need our privacy. And, I'm sorry for your loss.

BEVERLY MARTIN

Is it true? Was it suicide? She wasn't herself lately. Then, she went missing four days ago.

CHIEF

We're all sorry for your loss, but we have to let the Detective finish examining the scene. I'll take you home.

(to Helen)

We want this kept quiet.

The Chief begins walking Beverly down the hill, but turns back to Helen.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

And, nothing to the press! Got it?

HELEN

Yes, Sir.

The Chief and Beverly trudge downslope.

BEVERLY MARTIN

Why did she do it? Why?

Helen stomps up to Jane and whispers.

HELEN

You sent the Chief the photo? No wonder bad news travels fast. No more leaks, Jane. We haven't found her purse or phone, and her car is not down at the road, and we don't know where this guy, Tod Stephens, is.

Helen holds Jane's hand.

HELEN (CONT'D)

There's a lot we don't yet. Why don't we all get some rest -- if we can? We'll get back to you tomorrow about your preliminary findings.

JANE

Yes, Helen. Good idea.

HELEN

I'll need a fast-tracked forensic autopsy and a preliminary finding of a possible suicide, but nothing about the thumbs, until I find out more. I don't want to tip off the murderer.

JANE

You think she was murdered?

Helen sadly nods, "Yes."

HELEN

Thanks, Jane. I owe you one. See you tomorrow morning.

(to the CSI boys)

Let's get her out of here. This place is creepy. Whoever did this knew exactly what they were doing! I'll bag the rope.

Demonic sounds fill the night.

Jane and the CSI boys bag the body quickly.

Helen loads the rope into an evidence bag.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Who uses top-grade climbing rope to
hang someone?

INT. POLICE STATION, DETECTIVE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

On one computer screen, Helen sees photos of a beautiful and rich Suzi Martine (24) on social media. On a second screen, she gets a complete resume.

HELEN (V.O.)

MBA from Stanford at 21. Showoff.
Established Trading firm. Instant
success. No male fiends, but
several female companions. Forbes
list by 23. Net worth not stated.
Probably tens of millions. Peasant
dress remains a puzzle.

(sad)

Murdered at 24. The BOLOs been out
on the car for three days. Probably
in a chop shop by now. Successful
mom, divorced. Dad sells cars,
brother, Walter, is a question
mark, but none of them has a
criminal record.

She picks up a file labeled "Witnesses." It's empty, except for a yellow sticky that reads, "Tod Stevens? Truck?"

Helen shuts down her computer and stares at a wall clock that reads 2 AM.

She trudges to the door.

INT. HELEN'S SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

The street has little traffic. Helen exits the parking lot behind the station onto a dark, nearly empty side street.

She sees the lights on a dark SUV across the street light up as she drives along.

The SUV keeps a safe distance back, but Helen sees it in her rearview mirror.

HELEN

Where are those traffic cameras
when you need them?

(smiles)

I know.

Helen makes two left turns in a row to head back to the front of the police station. The SUV follows at a safe distance.

As she makes the left turn back to the front of the police station, she sees that the SUV is gone.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I thought so. They know where the
cameras are.

Helen drives a circuitous route home.

EXT. HELEN'S CONDO - CONTINUOUS

Demonic sounds fill the night.

Helen parks in the covered parking lot and enters her condo.

INT. HELEN'S CONDO - CONTINUOUS

Helen double locks her door, but keeps the lights off in her condo.

She sneaks a peek out of her front window, but sees nothing.

She moves away from the window, and we see the black SUV drive by slowly.

She grabs a plastic-wrapped sandwich from the fridge, pours a glass of wine, and heads to her bedroom.

She shuts the door before turning on the light, which we see from the bottom of the door.

INT. MORGUE - DAY

Detective Thanos enters with three cups of coffee in a travel pack.

Jane, wearing a baggy PPE suit, latex gloves, and a mask, stands over the body on a steel autopsy table.

JANE

It's just you and me, Helen. The Coroner got called away on an active shooting detail.

Helen hands Jane a cup of coffee and laughs.

HELEN

That suit fits you well.

Jane laughs.

JANE

PPE and hazmat suits were designed for males since the 1970s. They never figured women would need them.

HELEN

Are you still confused about the TOD?

JANE

The evidence stands. She was dead about seven hours before we found her, and was hanged four hours before it was called in.

HELEN

That's a monstrous search area for this heinous crime.

JANE

Murder?

HELEN

Torture and murder.

Helen stares at the body's shoulders.

HELEN (CONT'D)

What did Ms. Suzi Martin tell you?

JANE

You saw it right away as I did. Both shoulders are dislocated.

HELEN

Very painful.

Helen examines Suzi's thumbs.

HELEN (CONT'D)

And the thumbs?

JANE

Flattened or squeezed with something.

HELEN

Don't put this is you preliminary report. One common military torture technique is to tie the victims' hands behind their backs.

The Detective demonstrates the act.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Then the body is hoisted up slowly and suspended until the shoulders dislocate.

JANE

How awful!

HELEN

I think the perps also used medieval thumb screws on her thumbs, hence the peasant blouse.

JANE

Oh my God. But I did find a tattoo of a lavender flower on her upper thigh.

HELEN

Ah. The lavender menace.

(beat)

I'll need a full TOX report. I know that will take a day or two.

JANE

I sent blood in last night.

HELEN

Good thinking.

Jane looks back at the body.

JANE

But I haven't had time for stomach contents or histology.

HELEN

In this case, I don't think it was something she ate, but I won't rule out a heart attack yet, while being tortured.

JANE

I'm on it.

Helen's phone RINGS. A text reads, "We found her car. Airbnb 15822b PCH."

HELEN

We found her car. I'll brief the Chief on the way.

JANE

(Laughs)

Good luck with that!

Helen smiles as she exits.

INT. HELEN'S SEDAN - DAY

Helen speeds north on the Pacific Coast Highway. The Chief is on the car's hands-free speaker. A GIS map shows her location on the car's display.

HELEN

Thanks, Chief. I need a little more time. The autopsy is incomplete. We found her car up the Pacific Coast Highway, and I'm on my way now. I have uniforms in the area looking for Tod Stevens, or other potential witnesses, and they're finding no traffic cameras in the area.

CHIEF (V.O.)

Who is Tod Stevens? A boyfriend?

HELEN

Unlikely, Sir. But I'll let you know what I find in the car. Gotta run.

Helen skids to a stop.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Demonic sounds whisper.

Handsome OFFICER ART ALBERTI (25) stands between his patrol car and a fancy, new, Black SUV with heavily tinted windows.

OFFICER ALBERTI

DMV and a security alert system helped us locate the car.

(MORE)

OFFICER ALBERTI (CONT'D)
I've called our tow service, but I
thought you'd like to see it first,
Detective.

HELEN
Thanks, Officer--

OFFICER ALBERTI
Art Alberti.

HELEN
I'm Helen --

OFFICER ALBERTI
Thanos. We all know you and the way
you solved a double homicide in
Greece on your last vacation.

Helen looks around the car, frustrated about not being able
to see inside.

HELEN
(laughs)
I was in the wrong place at the
wrong time.

OFFICER ALBERTI
And the Eleusinian cult. I'd like
to hear more about it whenever you
have some free time.

HELEN
I can't see a damn thing.

OFFICER ALBERTI
It will be back at impound in an
hour. I will follow the car and
have the locksmith open for you.

HELEN
That's kind of you, Art. I have to
know if her phone and purse are in
there?

Helen looks around and sees a rock the size of a small
bowling ball.

Helen puts on latex gloves, walks slowly to the rock, and
picks it up. Officer Alberti is hesitant.

OFFICER ALBERTI
What--

HELEN
Did you tell me that the car had
been vandalized?

Helen tosses the rock through the driver's side window.

She leans into the window.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Damnit! No purse or phone.

OFFICER ALBERTI
What am I supposed to say?

HELEN
Tell Impound that I don't need a
locksmith. Thanks, Art!

Helen takes off the latex gloves and opens her car door.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Call me.

The Officer Alberti's eyes open wide as Helen speeds off.

INT. HELEN'S SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Helen speeds down the road.

Helen's phone RINGS, the console reads, "Chief," and she answers the hands-free phone by pressing a button on the steering wheel.

HELEN
Yes, Chief.

CHIEF (V.O.)
Did you find Suzi's purse and
phone?

HELEN
No, Sir. They were not in her car.
I'm afraid it indicates she might
have been abducted.

CHIEF (V.O.)
Why do you say that?

HELEN

Several days of saltwater and sand built up on the car, and the tops of the tires of the car were appreciably cleaner than lower parts of the tires, so the car hasn't moved in days. The house is an unrented Airbnb, but the car was parked out of view of the doorbell cam --

CHIEF (V.O.)

Are you done, Detective?

HELEN

Only to add that the perps knew what they were doing, Sir.

CHIEF (V.O.)

Perps? You knew it was an abduction and a murder, and you didn't tell me.

Helen sits up tall and grips the wheel like she would choke a neck.

HELEN

I was waiting on the autopsy results--

CHIEF (V.O.)

You're too late. I've called the FBI for the abduction, and Mrs. Martin is hiring a private investigator to ride with you on the murder investigation.

HELEN

Sir, if I may--

CHIEF (V.O.)

Mrs. Martin is with me now. We both went to ID her daughter, where I asked the M-E to fill us in on everything she has found to date.

Helen is too furious to speak as Beverly Martin weeps.

BEVERLY MARTIN (V.O.)

We know she was kidnapped and tortured. This was the work of the Devil!

Helen's eyes open wide, but she softens immediately.

HELEN (V.O.)
Yes, it's pretty awful. We don't
know who did this yet, but we'll
catch them.

Beverly Martin sobs in the background.

CHIEF (V.O.)
Mrs. Martin selected a PI who
specializes in the way that her
daughter was mistreated. His name
is Dr. Dionte Jackson. He
specializes in murderers who abduct
and torture their victims.

BEVERLY MARTIN (V.O.)
I'm paying for everything. Price is
no object. I want them found alive!

HELEN
Yes, Ma'am.

CHIEF (V.O.)
Dr. Jackson is landing at LAX any
time now from Atlanta! I want you
to pick him up from the airport. No
time to spare.

HELEN
Yes, Sir.

Helen pulls over at a scenic overlook.

She rolls down the windows to breathe deeply for a few
moments before pulling out her iPad.

Helen uses fingerprint, facial recognition, and a long pass
code to log into the LAPD Historic Criminal Database.

She searches for cases: "past 20 years, hanged women."

The screen reads, "6,590 cases."

She types "not including suicides."

The screen reads, "87-105 cases."

She types, "including abduction and torture."

The screen reads, "1."

HELEN (CONT'D)
Jerome, Idaho? Two weeks ago?

She pulls up the phone number and calls.

SHERIFF DANIELSON (V.O.)
Detective Helen Thanos? Los Angeles
PD?

HELEN
Hi, Sheriff. Thanks for taking my
call. I have a case involving the
hanging of an adult female that's
stumping me.

SHERIFF DANIELSON (V.O.)
Hanging case? We had a little lady
that hung herself a few weeks back.
First suicide by hanging ever, as
far as we know. It's always guns
'round here.

HELEN
Was your victim tortured at all
before--

SHERIFF DANIELSON (V.O.)
(laughs)
She weren't tortured. What do you
think we are up here--

HELEN
I'm sorry, Sheriff. Our victim had
dislocated shoulders and squished
thumbs.

SILENCE

SHERIFF DANIELSON (V.O.)
(angry)
We thought they was related to her
first failed suicide attempt. And
maybe hitting her thumbs with a
hammer when she fixed her back
door. It weren't a medieval witch
hunt like that kook Dr. Jackson
said, that's for damn sure!

HELEN
This sounds eerily familiar. Can
you send me the coroner's report
and your case file? My office will
be glad to--

CLICK

The Sheriff ends the call.

Helen quickly looks up "Dr. Jackson Medieval witch hunt."

She sees a smiling, handsome black man, "Dr. Dionte Jackson, Private Investigator, Atlanta, GA."

HELEN (CONT'D)

That's a spooky coincidence. I'd better get to the airport.

She takes a screenshot of the photo and contact information.

Helen speeds away, swearing under he breath.

EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - AFTERNOON

Helen drives slowly in the Passenger Pickup lane.

She glances frequently at her iPad with Dr. Jackson's photo.

She pulls over and calls his number. Before he answers, she looks up to see the handsome, black man.

DR. DIONTE JACKSON (35) looks quietly academic in comfortable pants, a tailored dark blue shirt, and a light blue sports coat. The old leather briefcase, thick black eyeglasses, and iPad give him away.

Helen steps out of the car and waves.

HELEN

Dr. Jackson!

He confirms her identification by staring at her LAPD photo on his iPad and strolls to her with his wheeled carry-on suitcase. He smiles.

DIONTE

Detective Thanos, call me Dionte.

HELEN

Only if you call me Helen.

He throws his suitcase and briefcase in the back seat and hops in.

HELEN (CONT'D)

How did you get roped in to helping me?

DIONTE

A thousand dollars a day plus expenses.

(MORE)

DIONTE (CONT'D)

And my employer wants me to charge
for your meals and expenses, too.

(laughs)

Where should we eat?

HELEN

(laughs)

Nick's Diner, the fanciest place in
town! But maybe later, the Chief
and Mrs. Martin want to meet you.

She speeds away.

INT. HELEN'S SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Helen goes right to work while she speeds recklessly.

HELEN

You were in Idaho two weeks ago.
Why?

Dionte glances suspiciously at Helen.

DIONTE

I suspect you already know. They
say a woman named Judith Fodor
hanged herself. They wouldn't let
me see the Coroner's report or the
case file, but a Cryptocurrency
Insurance firm hired me to dig
around.

HELEN

They never mentioned anything about
cryptocurrency.

DIONTE

Of course not. But before she was
murdered, I'm guessing she was
tortured to surrender her crypto
wallet passcodes, because, lo and
behold, she happened to transfer a
quarter million dollars to an
offshore account the day before.

HELEN

And you got paid by the insurance
company for making that connection?

DIONTE

The victim's life insurance company has a payout if it was a suicide or murder: in that case, it was a \$50,000 plan. But the cryptocurrency insurance she had only covers murder, not suicide. Her heirs could go after the full quarter-mill. I talked her husband into forcing the Justice Department to reopen the case for murder, and I'll get a small cut of the insurance savings, typically ten percent.

HELEN

How common is it for crypto thieves to use torture?

DIONTE

It's becoming so common that they are now referred to as "wrench attacks."

HELEN

So, it's not the Devil! I thought your Ph.D. was in Medieval History? Mrs. Martin thinks you're a Devil hunter.

DIONTE

She's not wrong, but my Devils are mostly evil gangsters looking for a quick buck.

INT. POLICE STATION, CHIEF'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

We join the conversation in progress as Mrs. Martin, Helen, and Dionte sit in three comfortable chairs facing the Chief. Mrs. Martin wears a blue pantsuit with an obvious crucifix necklace.

Helen and Dionte tap away on their iPads.

CHIEF

I'm glad your Devil-finding skills will be put to good use, Dr. Jackson.

Helen looks a bit bewildered.

DIONTE

The case file you sent me indicates similar torture techniques as those used in Medieval witch hunts, but the detective is right that we can't rule out robbery.

Mrs. Martin's eyes open wide.

HELEN

Mrs. Martin, we'd like access to your daughter's and your financial records to rule out robbery motives. We're following a similar case in Idaho.

The Chief and Mrs. Martin gasp.

BEVERLY MARTIN

Idaho? Oh dear.

DIONTE

It's purely procedural.

BEVERLY MARTIN

Whatever you need. Suzi never mentioned cryptocurrency.

DIONTE

The first rule of crypto trading is to never tell anyone you're a crypto trader.

BEVERLY MARTIN

Why?

DIONTE

When you own cryptocurrency, you become your own bank. If anyone learns your passcodes, they can rip you off.

BEVERLY MARTIN

Oh dear.

HELEN

We'd like to eliminate robbery as a motive in your daughter's case.

BEVERLY MARTIN

I see.

Helen reads from her iPad.

HELEN

We haven't found her phone or purse yet, but we have her phone record. There were no calls on it for four days.

CHIEF

That's common in kidnapping cases.

DIONTE

It may rule out extortion or a crypto theft, if--

HELEN

That was her only phone. We can't rule out a burner phone yet.

Beverly and Chief gasp.

Beverly stands, shaking in fear.

BEVERLY MARTIN

This is all the work of the Devil. I warned her! She'd never listen to me.

Helen moves to comfort Beverly, but she gets a text message on her phone. She reads it.

HELEN

Officer Alberti found Suzi's purse on the beach, close to where her car was found. Dionte, we gotta run!

Helen and Dionte race out.

INT. HELEN'S SEDAN - LATE AFTERNOON

Helen and Dionte drive along the Pacific Coast Highway.

DIONTE

The vic's mom is certain you need to arrest the Devil.

Helen glances at Dionte.

HELEN

And what do you think?

DIONTE

I was raised in a church made of fire and brimstone.

(MORE)

DIONTE (CONT'D)

My mom led the choir. We feared the Devil more than God. You?

HELEN

I was raised on stories of Greek Mythology. I knew fact from fiction by age seven, like Santa Claus.

DIONTE

(laughs)

I didn't totally disbelieve in Santa until I was 15. But I had everyone around me blurring the lines between what's real and what isn't. If I told my mama today that I didn't believe in God or the Devil, she'd whack me across the head.

HELEN

Like Mrs. Martin.

They arrive at the rental property. Suzi's car is gone.

Officer Alberti waits proudly with the purse in one hand and Suzi's phone in his other hand. He's not wearing latex gloves.

Helen screeches to a stop, and she's furious.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Demonic sounds whisper.

HELEN

Officer Alberti, why aren't you wearing gloves?

The Officer looks at his hands, embarrassed.

OFFICER ALBERTI

Right. Sorry. But they were on the beach, and I saved them from high tide.

Helen puts on latex gloves and puts the purse in one evidence bag and the phone in another.

HELEN

Art, this is Dr. Dionte Jackson, a consultant on the case. Can you show us where you found these items?

DIONTE

Hi, Art. Nice to meet you.

Art shakes hands with Dionte and walks to the beach.

HELEN

Your fingerprints will be all over the evidence.

OFFICER ALBERTI

Sorry about that, but the tide--

HELEN

She was missing up to four days. The tide would have taken it away by now if it could.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Demonic sounds fill the night.

They reach a spot far from the shoreline. The sand is heavily disturbed by human footprints and canine paw prints.

OFFICER ALBERTI

It was around here somewhere.

The Officer tromps around.

HELEN

There's no danger of high tide.

OFFICER ALBERTI

Where I don't remember, exactly. I was pretty excited. So I checked inside while I hiked back to my patrol car. When I saw it belonged to Suzi Martin, I texted you right away.

Dionte rolls his eyes.

OFFICER ALBERTI (CONT'D)

Her name and photo are all over social media. Hanged herself. Poor thing.

Helen's phone rings with Caller ID "Chief."

HELEN

Yes, Chief. We have the purse and phone.

CHIEF (V.O.)
 Beverly is mortified. A photo of her daughter hanging went viral on the Internet. I'm calling in everyone who was at the scene.

HELEN
 Yes, Chief.

CHIEF (V.O.)
 Except you. There's been another hanging in Malibu. We'll send the address.

HELEN
 We're 18 minutes away.

She ends the call.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 Let's go.

OFFICER ALBERTI
 Can I follow for crowd control, Helen?

HELEN
 You've done quite enough, Officer.

OFFICER ALBERTI
 It's Art. Malibu is my patrol area, too.

HELEN
 Don't touch anything this time!

Art leads them back to their cars, Helen and Dionte lag and whisper.

DIONTE
 He's like a puppy.

HELEN
 I don't think he's house-trained.

EXT. RAVINE - LATE AFTERNOON

Demonic sounds fill the area.

Helen follows GPS coordinates on the phone while trashing through bushes and under trees.

Dionte and Art follow several feet behind.

HELEN

Be careful of rattlesnakes and
poison oak.

DIONTE

I'm not allergic to poison ivy back
home, but I hate snakes.

OFFICER ALBERTI

I'm highly allergic to poison oak.
I'll stay here.

HELEN

Go back to the car if you want to
wait for the Medical Examiner and
crime team.

DIONTE

I'm coming with you. I carried my
EpiPen.

The Officer follows nervously.

OFFICER ALBERTI

At least there will be two of you
to carry me out if I get bitten.

They all stop when they smell the decaying body.

Helen points to a tree thirty feet away. A heavily decayed
corpse hangs from a tree.

Officer Alberti throws up.

HELEN

Stay here, Art.

OFFICER ALBERTI

If you insist.

Helen and Dionte put on latex gloves and M95 masks. Helen
turns on her body cam.

Helen walks to within ten feet of the body and stops.

HELEN

We'll wait for the crime team. What
do you see, Doctor?

DIONTE

The rope is tied to the same trunk,
but there's no chair, stool, or
rock to step off.

Helen smiles at Dionte.

HELEN

Exactly. The hair on her head was entirely shaved off. Maybe her eyebrows, too. This isn't a suicide either. Looks to be female, but without hair and with the advanced state of decay, with extreme bloat, blackish-green skin discoloration, and severe lingering odor -- I can't be sure.

DIONTE

The smell is nauseating, an unforgettable mixture of rotting meat, rancid fat, and sour sewage. I've never seen or smelled anything like it. I'm backing way up!

HELEN

Send in the crime scene when they arrive. I'm going to have a look around.

(yells)

Art, call HQ and have the detectives gather info on missing persons for the past three months, and find out who called in the body.

Officer Alberti is gone.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT

Helen and Dionte exit the autopsy room and remove ventilation masks. They wait to speak to the Medical Examiner (Jane).

DIONTE

I'll need some fresh air.

Dionte races to the door.

Jane, in PPE, exits and removes her ventilation mask.

JANE

Did we lose your friend? He's cute.

HELEN

He's smart, too. But he has a weak stomach.

Jane laughs.

JANE

He sounds too normal for you.

They can see the body through a window.

Dionte returns with a weak smile.

HELEN

We guessed about three weeks. What else can you tell us, Jane?

JANE

Yes, TOD is about three weeks. Cause of death may take a while.

DIONTE

Was she tortured?

JANE

We don't have an ID yet, but I sent in DNA samples. Her shoulders didn't appear to be dislocated. You noticed the bald head and eyebrows, but she was shaved everywhere, top to bottom.

DIONTE

That's odd.

JANE

The skin is greatly discolored, but I looked for birthmarks to help with the ID.

HELEN

Where do most birthmarks appear on the female body?

DIONTE

Good question.

Helen and Dionte glance at each other and share a moment.

JANE

Birthmarks are found on the face, neck, scalp, chest, back, and buttocks, but the most common are on the face and neck: those Port-wine-looking stains, and she had one on the back of her neck.

DIONTE

Was there anything unusual about it?

JANE

Maybe. I'll need a more careful dissection, but it appeared to me like there were a dozen or so pinpricks into the birthmark.

DIONTE

That's odd, too.

HELEN

And painful too if she were alive.

JANE

Purely conjecture, given the state of decay, but I can tell you that thin 12-millimeter Jute Rope is a slow way to hang.

HELEN

Do you think she was dead before being strung up like Suzi Martin?

JANE

Yes, I do!

Helen pulls Dionte by the arm.

HELEN

Thanks, Jane. Please let me know when you have an ID. We've got work to do.

INT. POLICE STATION, DETECTIVE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Helen stares at the rudimentary murder board. Across the top, it reads, "Three females hanged."

Helen and Dionte eat from a container of Chinese food with chopsticks. They share a bottle of white wine.

On the left is a photo of Suzi Martin (24), 1-week ago abducted, tortured, murdered, and then hanged. Crypto owner. [Need TOX report] Truck? Tod Stevens?

In the Middle is a photo of Judith Fodor, age ?, 2-weeks ago, Hanged, Suicide? Crypto owner. [need case file]. Idaho. Sheriff Danielson?

On the right side of the murder board is a photo that reads, "ID? age ?, 3-weeks ago, Shaved, tortured? Murdered, hanged, Crypto owner." [need autopsy, DNA].

HELEN
Thanks for dinner and wine.

DIONTE
(laughs)
Expense account.

Helen is smitten with her charismatic guest.
She laughs, then asks a serious question.

HELEN
What kind of person would do this?

DIONTE
You're looking for similarities,
where I see differences.

Dionte eats more food with chopsticks.

HELEN
The similarities will tell me if
we're dealing with a serial killer.

DIONTE
It's scarier for me to think that
they might be the work of different
sick and twisted people.

Helen points to the Idaho victim in the middle.

HELEN
One week apart is plenty of time to
drive from here to Idaho and back.

DIONTE
You've eliminated the possibility
of a greater evil presence.

Helen is defensive but calm.

HELEN
Unlike Beverly Martin, I've
eliminated the Devil as a suspect.

SILENCE

Helen smiles.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Is that why she hired you? To
convert me?

DIONTE

History has taught me that many civilizations were not that civilized. We talk about the Holocaust, where 4 million Jews were targeted. Still, in that same millennium, the 1900s, there were seven state-sponsored genocides around the world, killing 200,000 to 2 million people each. Armenian, Cambodian, Rwandan, Darfur, Holodomor, and Assyrian.

HELEN

We're not talking genocide here, just murder.

Dionte looks away.

DIONTE

Genocide is one murder at a time.

HELEN

What are you getting at, Dionte?

DIONTE

I studied several religious wars, including the Crusades, the French wars between Catholics and Protestants, and the Thirty Years' War. However, the most infamous wars in human history are the wars between good and evil, God and the Devil.

Helen studies Dionte. He's deadly serious.

HELEN

Do you mean like the Inquisition?

DIONTE

In its many forms. Yes. Don't get me started on witch hunts!

Helen's phone RINGS. Caller ID reads, "Tod Stevens."

HELEN

Mr. Tod Stevens? Where are you?

TOD (V.O.)

Outside your police station.

HELEN

I'll be right down to let you in.

Helen glares at Dionte.

HELEN (CONT'D)

This is our first lead in Suzi Martin's case. Please don't say a word about Angels and Demons while he's here. And turn around that board for me.

Dionte nods, "Yes," and gestures that he zips his lips shut.

Helen laughs as she exits.

Moments later, Helen guides a young Cowboy, TOD STEVENS (21), into the Detective's room. He's a tall, muscular kid who barely looks sixteen. He wears blue jeans with a silver belt buckle, a western shirt, cowboy boots, and a baseball cap.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Tod, this is Dr. Dionte Jackson, a private investigator consulting on our case.

Dionte leaps to shake Tod's hand.

DIONTE

Call me Dionte, Tod. Thanks for coming in.

HELEN

Have a seat, Tod. Hungry or thirsty?

TOD

I could use some water. I'm as parched as a desert coyote.

Helen and Dionte pick up on the coyote pronounced as Ki-yoat.

Helen grabs him a bottle of water.

HELEN

Tell us about yourself, Tod.

TOD

I work on a movie star's ranch, but I signed an oath of secrecy not to talk about it, or I get fired.

Helen smiles.

HELEN

An NDA, non-disclosure agreement.

TOD

That's it. And I can't even bring unwanted attention to the ranch, or I lose my truck.

DIONTE

Very private people. We understand.

Tod smiles at Dionte.

TOD

Exactly. I never met rich people before them.

HELEN

What brought you to that particular road on that night?

TOD

They pay me good, but I only get one night a week to go courtin'.

HELEN

Is that a hot spot for courtin'?

TOD

No, Ma'am. Especially after taking a few gummies?

DIONTE

Were you high--

TOD

Higher than a soaring eagle in the jet stream, Sir.

HELEN

You parked along that dark road.

TOD

You gotta land somewhere, Ma'am. So I pulled over and sat in my truck with the windows down until a strange woman who looked like Pillsbury Doughboy parked behind me. Scared me out of my britches, so I told her my name and took off flying.

HELEN

May I see your phone, Tod?

Tod hands her his phone. It's not passcode-protected.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You didn't call the police that night?

She examines his recent calls, gets a screenshot, and texts it to herself.

TOD

No, Ma'am. I didn't want to take one of them roadside sobriety tests neither, so I skedaddled.

DIONTE

Did you see anyone else in that area while you were there?

TOD

Not a soul. I swear on a stack of Bibles.

DIONTE

Are you religious, Tod?

Helen glares at Dionte and then smiles.

TOD

Catholic, but I get to use the pool on Sunday mornings if I skip Mass.

HELEN

Thanks, Tod. I think we're done here.

Dionte smiles.

DIONTE

I've got one more question, Tod. How is the courtin' going?

Tod laughs innocently.

TOD

Being single means being stupid, Dr. Jackson.

Dionte toasts his glass of wine.

DIONTE

Poetic and accurate, Tod. Nice to meet you.

Helen hands Tod his phone and guides him out.

Moments later, Helen returns with a smile.

Dionte turns around the murder board.

DIONTE (CONT'D)

Your number one person of interest
is a sweet, lonely cowboy.

Helen points to the name Sheriff Danielson.

HELEN

No one gets erased until we solve
the case. Tomorrow, we'll fly into
Boise to speak with Sheriff
Danielson while the autopsies here
are being completed.

DIONTE

Sheriff Danielson didn't like me.

Helen shows Dionte a folded piece of paper.

HELEN

Then he'll love my warrant!

They laugh.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Come on. You can stay at my place.
I've got a spare room. You can buy
us the plane tickets and a rental
car.

They clean up and exit.

EXT. HELEN'S CONDO - NIGHT

Helen parks in the covered parking lot and enters her condo.

HELEN

I wasn't followed tonight.

DIONTE

That's comforting.

INT. HELEN'S CONDO - CONTINUOUS

Helen double locks her door, but keeps the lights off in her
condo. A clock reads midnight.

She sneaks a peek out of her front window, but sees nothing.

DIONTE

Do you do this every night?

HELEN

I was shadowed last night by a black SUV, so I double-locked the door and only used the light in my room with the door locked.

DIONTE

(laughs)
We could do that again.

HELEN

(points at him)
You little Devil, you! Get online and buy us plane tickets.

DIONTE

I got them while we were in the car. We depart at 5:45 AM.

Helen's phone buzzes -- and a map shows up.

HELEN

Tod is back at the ranch.

DIONTE

Did you put spyware on his phone?

HELEN

I trust no one. We leave here in four hours. Get some sleep.

EXT. AIRPORT IN IDAHO - LATE MORNING

Demonic sounds whisper.

Dionte and Helen carry small backpacks and briefcases to an awaiting SUV.

HELEN

Please take me to Sheriff Danielson. I can't believe you slept the entire plane ride.

DIONTE

Drugs. And my pleasure.

HELEN

Are you okay to drive?

DIONTE

(laughs)
No heavy equipment like a tractor.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NOON

Helen's eyes are wide open when Dionte parks in front of the office. They exit the SUV.

HELEN
I'm lucky to be alive.

DIONTE
(laughs)
Me too.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Helen walks in like she owns the place and goes straight to the Sheriff's desk, holding up her badge.

It's cold in the office.

HELEN
Hi, Sheriff. I'm Detective Helen
Thanos of the LAPD. We spoke on the
phone.

The Sheriff doesn't look up.

SHERIFF DANIELSON
So.

Helen slaps two warrants on his desk.

HELEN
So, the first warrant allows us to
search every file in your office
until we find what we're looking
for, and the second is a warrant
for your arrest if you impede our
investigation. We have a private
charter waiting to fly you back
with us, in handcuffs, if you
resist.

The Sheriff looks up to see that Dionte is filming the action alongside the Detective's body cam.

DIONTE
Hi, Sheriff. We've met. I'm sending
a live feed to my office in case
something happens to us.

HELEN
We want the case files and the
Coroner's report for Judith Fodor.

The Sheriff smiles.

SHERIFF DANIELSON
I'm happy to do this again.

HELEN
Again.

SHERIFF DANIELSON
The FBI and a Crypto Security
Officer from Interpol came in for
complete copies.

Dionte quits filming and walks up to the Sheriff's desk like
he's frightened.

DIONTE
I know why the FBI was here, but
Interpol?

The Sheriff opens a drawer of his desk with a key and tosses
two files onto his desk.

Helen begins reading the autopsy report. Her voice quivers in
shock.

HELEN
Victim found in the desert with
evidence of water torture, like
waterboarding. Two dislocated
shoulders and fingernails removed.

SHERIFF DANIELSON
This is bigger than both your tiny
asses. The Interpol Crypto Security
Officer was talking about the
Devil, witch hunts, and some book
called the Molly-something.

DIONTE
(voice quivering)
The *Malleus Maleficarum*. The Hammer
of Witches.

The mention of the book gives Dionte a sudden chill.

Helen looks compassionately at Dionte.

HELEN
What's this about, Dionte?

DIONTE

You have to see it to believe it.
I'll explain on the way to a
community college in Oregon. Let's
go!

HELEN

I have the names of the agents who
were here. Thanks for your time,
Sheriff.

Helen feels a chill in the air.

The Sheriff laughs as he threatens Helen.

SHERIFF DANIELSON

Be extra careful, young lady. We're
hunting witches again.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

Dionte races back to the airport like a bat out of Hell.

Demonic sounds grow from a whisper to a mild roar.

HELEN

What is the Hammer of Witches?

DIONTE

Back in 1496, a Dominican priest
named Heinrich Kramer wrote a book
that advocated the killing of women
who were in league with the Devil.

Helen is unconvinced.

HELEN

The fictional Devil.

DIONTE

At the time, no. Everyone who
believed in God was predisposed to
believe He created His arch-
nemesis, Satan.

HELEN

Why would he do that?

DIONTE

Like the Greeks created Zeus and
Hades, good versus evil.

HELEN

We don't have time for this silly discussion. We have to call the FBI agent and the Interpol Crypto Security Officer to see what they're after.

Dionte ignores her suggestion. He's on a roll.

DIONTE

That's the greatest evil in the Hammer of Witches. Anyone could be accused of being a witch -- but they were almost always women, like your victims.

HELEN

The FBI and Interpol?

DIONTE

You see, the *Malleus Maleficarum* blurred theology, superstition, and law by making the Inquisitors of witches above the law.

HELEN

Above the law?

DIONTE

Anyone could be accused of being a witch, and their denial proved it more. Confessions obtained under torture were treated as valid, despite the accused confessing to impossible acts such as flying on a broomstick, performing magic, or having sex with the Devil.

HELEN

Did all townspeople believe in the Inquisitors?

DIONTE

If they didn't, they were witches. All the accused would be tortured the way your victims were tortured until they confessed. They were forced to sign the confessions, often being told would be set free if they confessed. When, by law, if they confessed, their property would be turned over to the Inquisitor.

HELEN

A money-making scam? That's why the
FBI is getting involved!

DIONTE

And they would be hanged anyway.

Helen is stunned.

DIONTE (CONT'D)

And the Inquisitors were seen as
heroes for restoring Godliness to
the region. There were tens of
thousands of executions over almost
400 years.

HELEN

You're getting a little crazy about
this witch's angle to our case. How
could people be so gullible?

DIONTE

You'll see.

Helen's phone RINGS with a caller ID of FBI.

HELEN

FBI. I suppose I should pick up.

She answers on speaker. FBI SPECIAL AGENT VICTORIA WILCOX
(35) is on the line.

HELEN (CONT'D)

This is Detective Thanos.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (V.O.)

Please take me off the speaker.

Helen glances at Dionte, then complies.

HELEN

Done.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (V.O.)

I'm Special Agent Victoria Wilcox
of the Cybersecurity Branch of the
FBI. This is a courtesy call from
the Bureau.

HELEN

Were you the agent who met with
that delightful Sheriff Danielson
in Idaho? We just left his office.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (V.O.)
Who is "we?" Are you relaying
classified information to someone
in your vehicle?

HELEN
Are you tracking us?

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (V.O.)
The purpose of my call will now be
brief until you are alone in a
secure location.

HELEN
Go on.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (V.O.)
We're taking over your
investigation. Your Chief agrees.
You will cease your investigation
of the three vics on your
rudimentary murder board. We've
determined that these cases are
connected to Crypto theft and other
wrench attacks along the East Coast
and Europe. You are on Leave until
further notice. Is that clear?

Helen makes fake "static" noise.

HELEN
Sorry, I'm losing... connect... in
rural... Id...

She ends the call and screams at Dionte.

HELEN (CONT'D)
The bastards took us off the case.

Helen's phone RINGS with a caller ID of Chief.

She doesn't pick up.

She looks around and yells.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You passed the airport!

DIONTE
You're on leave, but I'm on the
clock. We'll save my client money
by driving to Portland.

HELEN
Portland? That's six hours away!

DIONTE
We'd better power down our phones
so they can't track us.

HELEN
We can pick up burner phones in
Boise.

DIONTE
Oooh. Off the grid!

Dionte smiles at Helen, and they share a moment.

They power down their phones and see a highway sign, "BOISE
20."

INT. SUV - AFTERNOON

The mood is light, and the car is littered with fast-food
wrappers and coffee cups. Dionte is driving well over the
speed limit.

HELEN
What's your hurry? We're heading to
a Community College, right?

DIONTE
We're meeting the Archives Director
there tonight. The library will be
closed. I'm supposed to call her
when we're 20 minutes out.

HELEN
How did we score a private showing
of a book from 1490 worth over 200
grand?

DIONTE
I've spoken with Archive Director,
Wilma Mueller, several times on the
phone, but we've never met.

HELEN
Mueller, is that German?

DIONTE
She's Argentinian.
(beat)
Do you ever talk about non-work?

HELEN
(laughs)
Not much to talk about there.

DIONTE
Come on! Out with it.

HELEN
I'm sure it happens to every woman
who vacations in Greece.

DIONTE
Good start.

HELEN
I met a charming, charismatic,
intelligent --

DIONTE
Sounds like me --

HELEN
Archaeologist --

DIONTE
Oh sh --

HELEN
He tried to frame me for
antiquities theft, and he tried to
kill me by shoving me into a pit
covered by a heavy rock with the
symbol of Hades on it.

DIONTE
You apparently escaped Hell.

HELEN
Only to find he was a leader of an
Eleusinian cult from four thousand
years ago. And he tried to kill me
again.

DIONTE
You sure know how to pick 'em.

HELEN
How about your last relationship?

DIONTE
I have almost an identical story.
(winks at Helen)
(MORE)

DIONTE (CONT'D)

She said I learned so much about the past, I forgot how to live in the present.

HELEN

I'm sorry.

DIONTE

She dumped me for a mycology professor. He was a real fun-guy.

She slaps his arm.

HELEN

What really happened?

DIONTE

She dumped me for a beautiful woman.

HELEN

I can't tell if you're serious.

DIONTE

I am. That one took some couch time.

Helen looks away and mumbles.

HELEN

So did mine.

The SUV enters a bank of fog, which sprang up suddenly.

The tone turns dark.

Demonic sounds are whispering.

DIONTE

Uh-oh. This is a sign.

HELEN

You're kidding, right?

DIONTE

We're getting closer to the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Helen shakes her head in disbelief.

She looks over and sees that Dionte's hands are shaking on the steering wheel.

HELEN

Are you feeling okay? Why don't you
let me drive for a while?

DIONTE

I can't.

The fog thickens, the tone darkens. Dionte's hands shake
more.

Helen checks her burner phone.

HELEN

Prepaid card for a month, and I
can't get a signal. I'm going to
power up my good phone.

Dionte is angry.

DIONTE

No! They'll catch us.

HELEN

Who will catch us, Dionte?

DIONTE

I don't know. Them!

HELEN

Okay, you're scaring me. Pull over
at the next turnout.

EXT. HIGHWAY PULLOUT - EVENING

Demonic sounds fill the night.

It's foggy, dark, and eerie. Dionte paces aimlessly. Helen
tries to soothe him.

HELEN

It's just a book, right?

DIONTE

A book nearly got Galileo killed.

Helen tries to calm him with a softly told story.

HELEN

My dad told me that story dozens of
times. Galileo's improvements to
the telescope let him see Jupiter,
the phases of Venus, and the rings
of Saturn.

DIONTE
 (softly)
 And he knew the Bible was wrong.

HELEN
 (excited)
 Right. He knew the sun was the
 center of our solar system, not the
 Earth.

DIONTE
 He became a celebrity. Like the
 Inquisitors of witches and serial
 killers hope to be.

HELEN
 Serial killers? That got dark
 quickly.

DIONTE
 We're not prepared for the *Malleus
 Maleficarum*.

HELEN
 You said we were going to get a
 quick look at it and then take a
 red-eye to LA!

DIONTE
 What if it won't let us leave? What
 if it steals our souls?

Helen is angry.

HELEN
 That's it. Give me the keys. You
 can lie down in the backseat!

Dionte gives Helen the keys and reclines in the passenger
 seat.

Helen gets in and takes off slowly.

EXT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE LIBRARY - NIGHT

As Helen walks to the front door, she practically has to push
 Dionte along. He's a nervous wreck.

The library is dark except for the dim lights down a long
 hallway. Behind a thick glass door is WILMA MUELLER (65), a
 short gray woman in a print dress and green hoodie
 sweatshirt. She looks over 90 years old and has a German
 accent.

She unlocks the door and lets them in. Dionte regains a bit more composure.

DIONTE

Thanks for seeing us so late, Mrs. Mueller. I'm Dr. Dionte Jackson, a private investigator, and this is--

Helen steps up with a big smile.

HELEN

And I'm Detective Helen Thanos of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Satisfied with the introduction, Mrs. Mueller locks the door, turns, and trudges down the long hallway.

MRS. MUELLER

This way.

Dionte looks around like he's in a horror movie. He hears the demonic whispers that no one else hears.

Helen tries to ease his pain.

HELEN

Dr. Jackson is a bit tired from the drive from Boise. I admit, I'm kind of excited to see such an ancient text.

MRS. MUELLER

Pope Innocent VIII issued a bull, a forward, if you will, sanctioning the book a few years before it came out.

HELEN

Quite an endorsement.

MRS. MUELLER

At first, I don't think he foresaw the ramifications.

(laughs)

But he knew about popularity, and everyone at the time hated witches.

Dionte shakes slightly and looks around.

DIONTE

The Vatican withdrew its endorsement in 1630, but the witch hunts went on well into the 1700s.

Mrs. Mueller turns to glare at Dionte.

MRS. MUELLER
I'll tell the stories tonight,
Darkie.

Helen's and Dionte's eyes open wide.

Mrs. Mueller turns to glare at Helen.

MRS. MUELLER (CONT'D)
And I'm not so keen on you, a damn
female detective!

Helen and Dionte glance at each other, concerned.

Mrs. Mueller trudges on to unlock another door.

They all enter, and Mrs. Mueller locks the door behind them.

She leads them to a small, dimly lit "study room" with another door.

As they enter the door, a chill hits Helen and Dionte.

MRS. MUELLER (CONT'D)
This is the same temperature and
humidity as the Vatican Apostolic
Archive.

On the table rests the ancient text: *Malleus Maleficarum*.
It's 15 x 9 x 4 inches, with thin wooden covers wrapped in
pigskin.

The mood is tense as MRS. Mueller puts on latex gloves to
open to the title page.

The lights flicker in the room. Dionte backs up to the door.

Mrs. Mueller sounds ominous.

MRS. MUELLER (CONT'D)
Many called this the most dangerous
book in the world for centuries --
and still do.

HELEN
(mumbles)
Second only to the Bible?

Mrs. Mueller snaps at Helen.

MRS. MUELLER

One more outburst and I'll kill you
myself.

Dionte is more frightened than Helen.

Mrs. Mueller thumbs through the major sections, and we hear
Helen or Dionte as commentators.

DIONTE

That's it! A second edition of the
"Hammer of Witches, 1490 or 1491.

Dionte steps back from the book and shivers.

Helen glances back at Dionte.

HELEN (V.O.)

I was worried about Dionte. How
could the presence of an old book
have that effect on him? He holds a
Ph.D. for Christ's sake.

Helen glares at the book.

Mrs. Mueller advances to the next section. She mumbles.

HELEN (V.O.)

Get this: Part I argues that the
existence of witchcraft is
essential to the Catholic faith,
and disbelief in it is heresy.

(beat)

It argues women are more prone to
witchcraft because they're
emotional and intellectually
inferior, not to mention they have
sex with the Devil. I'm calling
B.S.!

DIONTE

Get on with it. We know witchcraft
is prevalent -- even today!

Helen doesn't glance at Dionte, but she grimaces.

Mrs. Mueller advances to the next section. She mumbles.

The lights flicker again. Dionte shivers more.

HELEN (V.O.)

Jesus, Part II includes the
complete effects that witches have
on individuals and communities.

(MORE)

HELEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Witches cause plagues, kill
 livestock, hurt children, and cause
 impotence. BS!

Helen glances back. Dionte's eyes are wide open in fright.

Mrs. Mueller advances to the next section. She mumbles.

HELEN (V.O.)
 Holy shit! Part III is the
 instruction manual on how to
 prosecute, torture to get
 confessions, and sentence witches
 to death to purify your community.
 Even worse, disbelief in witches is
 heresy and makes you a witch!

MRS. MUELLER
 The book became an instant best-
 seller. Every village had disease,
 dying livestock, and ill-behaved--

HELEN
 Women?

MRS. MUELLER
Witches!

Dionte hears demonic sounds and races out the door.

HELEN
 Thank you, Mrs. Mueller. I think
 we're done here.

As Helen leaves, Mrs. Mueller warns Helen.

MRS. MUELLER
 Your Doctor friend sees the truth.
 Witches cannot.

EXT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE LIBRARY - NIGHT

Helen and Dionte exit the library, with Mrs. Mueller glaring
 at them as she locks the door.

The demonic sounds disappear.

Helen turns to wave goodbye. Dionte does not.

Mrs. Mueller glares at Helen and shakes her head, "No."

HELEN
 What a spooky woman.

DIONTE

I'd rather not talk about her or
the book.

Helen half-laughs, trying to ease his tension.

HELEN

Fine with me. It was all Medieval
bullshit to me.

Dionte ignores the comment.

DIONTE

Our red-eye flight to LA leaves in
ninety minutes.

Helen gets in the passenger seat.

EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - MORNING

Helen walks quickly to her car in a state of controlled
anger. She powers up her work phone as she walks.

HELEN

You barely said two words to me
since Portland, but thanks for the
flight home. I'm sure you can't
wait to get back to Atlanta.

Dionte powers up his work phone as he walks.

DIONTE

I have a job to do.

HELEN

Twenty-seven missed calls and ten
messages from the Chief.

DIONTE

No calls from Mrs. Martin.
(sadly)
I hope she's okay.

Dionte calls her, not realizing she's on speaker.

DIONTE (CONT'D)

Mrs. Martin, I'm back in Los
Angeles. You were right about the
Devil. Are you okay?

Beverly's voice is dark and spooky.

BEVERLY MARTIN (V.O.)
 You're fired. Submit your final
 bill. You'll be flying home on your
 own dime.

Beverly ends the call.

HELEN
 That sounded bad. I wonder what I
 have in store. Would you mind
 driving while I check my messages?

Helen hands Dionte her car keys.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 I need to shower before I see the
 Chief.

Dionte smiles, which Helen sees.

INT. HELEN'S SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Helen is relaxed and checking her phone.

HELEN
 Hey, you're back among the living.

DIONTE
 (laughs)
 Right. I think I had too much
 Medieval history as a kid. I'm
 sorry about --

HELEN
 Forget it.

DIONTE
 And that Mrs. Mueller --

HELEN
 A witch herself.

DIONTE
 I need to remember my critical
 thinking skills. Many people
 believe in the Devil and witches.

HELEN
 (snickers)
 I looked that up on the plane.
 Almost six out of ten Americans
 believe in the Devil.

DIONTE
 (snickers back)
 And one out of four Americans
 believes in witches.

Helen checks a phone location app.

HELEN
 Tod Stevens hasn't left his ranch.
 I still have no suspects in Suzi's
 case or the Malibu victim.

DIONTE
 Aren't you off the case anyway?

Helen checks her messages from the Chief.

HELEN
 Shit! Last night there was another
 hanging! Please go straight to the
 station.

INT. POLICE STATION, CHIEF'S OFFICE - DAY

The Station is buzzing. Helen and Dionte head straight to the Chief's office, where three agents await them with suspicious looks. SPECIAL AGENT VICTORIA WILCOX (40s) wears a blue pantsuit and an authoritative posture. Agent MAX EDWARDS (30s) is her meek subordinate in a blue suit, and the Interpol Crypto Security Officer KLAUS SCHMIDT (35) is an overweight German pit bull.

The Chief stands with a solemn look.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
 Before we begin, I'd like Dr.
 Jackson to leave the room.

DIONTE
 Do we know each other?

Special Agent Wilcox shows Dionte his photo and resume on her iPad.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
 (glares at Dionte)
 I know that we don't share
 information on active
 investigations with civilians.
 (glares at Helen)
 Isn't that SOP, Detective Thanos?

HELEN

Yes, Ma'am. Standard Operating Procedure.

Special Agent Wilcox shows Helen her photo and resume from her iPad.

The Special Agent glares at the Chief, who coughs nervously.

CHIEF

Dr. Jackson, I'm afraid I'm going to ask you --

Special Agent Wilcox glares at Dionte and points to the door.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Leave!

Dionte exits immediately.

HELEN

He's done nothing wrong.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

No, but you have. You've been sharing classified police investigation details with a private investigator.

CHIEF

I told her she could.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

That's what my report will say. Let's hope the two of you--

HELEN

Tell me about the latest hanging.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

(glares at the Chief)

You told me she was off the case.

CHIEF

Detective Thanos has the best instincts of any detective I've ever met. We have a serial killer to catch. She is back on the case!

HELEN

Thanks, Chief.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
If either of you impede our
cybersecurity case, you'll be
parking meter maids until you
retire. Do I make myself clear?

HELEN
The correct term is Parking
Enforcement Officer or PEO.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
Sounds like you're begging to be a
Parking Enforcement Officer-Nobody,
or PEON.

(points to Max)
That's Agent Max Edwards, my
assistant.

(points to Klaus)
Klaus Schmidt, a Crypto Security
Officer, is with Interpol.

Max is afraid to speak, but Klaus commands the room.

AGENT SCHMIDT
Interpol has an interest in the
skyrocketing number of wrench cases
around the world. Cryptocurrency
owners are targeted after data
breaches, and organized crime is
there to swoop in. They will use
physical coercion, abduction, and
torture for asset theft. They'll
use facial recognition to unlock
the phones of their victims and
threaten their families and
friends.

HELEN
Or maybe we're dealing with a nut-
case who likes to torture and kill
women.

AGENT SCHMIDT
Our tracking system shows that at
least two of your victims owned a
great deal of crypto. We don't
believe in coincidences.
(smiles at Helen)
Or Devils or witches!

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
Come see my murder board.

They march to Helen's murder board.

She is stunned to see five new photos added to the board.

Special Agent Wilcox points to the fourth victim. The tag reads, "Jane Doe #2." She's poor person in rags and wears dirty sweatpants, two sweat shirts, and a 1990 Army jacket with a Special Forces badge on the left shoulder and a faded name tag reading "MARTINEZ."

The Chief joins them while Wilcox speaks.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (CONT'D)

Found this morning, before dawn in Topanga Canyon, hanged by a thin but strong nylon rope. We still don't have an ID on your 3-week vic, Jane Doe #1, so this is Jane Doe #3.

Helen takes a red marker and crosses out "Jane Doe #2."

HELEN

She's wearing a legit 1990 Army Jacket from Operation Desert Storm.
(points to the badge)
Special Forces.

AGENT EDWARDS

She could have gotten it from any thrift store.

HELEN

I'm guessing Sergeant Martinez was in communications or administration, rather than in a combat role. The Army could pay her less, leading to homelessness.
(to Agent Edwards)
Those jackets meant everything to soldiers in special forces. She should be easy to trace.

AGENT EDWARDS

How do you know she was homeless?

HELEN

Weathered leathery skin, broken nails, ratty hair, the teeth of a Meth addict, and tragic death. The TOX report will confirm it.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Listen here, Detective --

Helen points to the cord.

HELEN

She hung herself with a Type III
550-pound-test parachute chord. She
had enough.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

How could you know--

HELEN

She wasn't tortured, except by her
government, which abandons far too
many veterans.

(smiles at Klaus)

And I doubt she was a major crypto
owner.

Helen starts to take down her photo.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Don't touch that!

HELEN

She wasn't murdered, and doesn't
belong with these three other vics.
Please show her some respect,
Special Agent Wilcox.

CHIEF

I'll get her remains to Arlington.

Helen sees four other photos listed as "persons of interest,"
including Officer Arthur Alberti, Tod Stevens, Sheriff
Danielson (Idaho), and Dr. Dionte Jackson.

Helen shakes her head in disgust as the Interpol agent
chuckles.

HELEN

I'm going home to shower. I'll be
back after lunch. I'm taking one of
your persons of interest with me.

Special Agent Wilcox glares at Helen.

Dionte, standing by the door, heard it all. He cracks up,
laughing.

INT. HELEN'S CONDO - NOON

The bathroom door is open a few inches, and we HEAR Helen and
Dionte showering together. They giggle intermittently.

HELEN (V.O.)
Do you think showering with a
person of interest is a good idea?

DIONTE (V.O.)
(laughs)
I sure as hell do!
(beat)
I'm sorry for being such a wimp in
Portland. I'm braver than that in
my dreams.

HELEN (V.O.)
I know. You talked in your sleep on
the plane.

DIONTE
What did I say?

HELEN (V.O.)
Something about shedding a tear.

Shocked and laughing.

DIONTE
I wonder who that was for? Maybe my
mama. I still miss her, but I'm
glad she can't see me now.

Helen laughs as Dionte, hiding his genitals, positions
himself behind Helen to kiss the back of her neck.

We hear kissing from Dionte and happy moans from Helen,
before Dionte suddenly exits the shower.

Helen is silent.

LATER

They are both nicely dressed like professionals.

DIONTE (CONT'D)
I have to call Mrs. Martin and find
out what changed so fast.

HELEN
There's a courtyard if you need
more privacy.

DIONTE
Maybe I will slip out.

Out of the corner of her eye, Helen sees that Dionte grabbed
his burner phone rather than his regular phone.

Donte steps out, and Helen instinctively locks the door behind him.

She pauses to think. She pulls out her iPad and checks her notes on her calendar. The notes show "Jane Doe #1, found hanged here, abducted a few days earlier?" The next week shows, Judith Fodor (26), hanged, abducted a few days earlier, week and tortured, and one week later, notes read, "Suzi Martin (25?), abducted 4 days earlier, tortured, and hanged.

Helen looks back at the door. She races into the spare room.

She PEEKS into his leather briefcase. She sees an iPad, a MacBook computer, and TWO smartphones.

She exits the room quickly and leaps to the kitchen just as Dionte knocks on the door.

She leaps to the door and answers with a smile.

DIONTE (CONT'D)

Tight security.

HELEN

It's instinct. Sorry. I was about to make coffee.

Dionte peeks in the kitchen and sees a large bag of French Roast beans.

DIONTE

(laughs)

You're serious about your coffee, but I don't have time.

(serious)

I have an Uber coming to take me to Mrs. Martin's house.

HELEN

Will you drop by the station later?

DIONTE

Maybe. Maybe not. That depends on Mrs. Martin and flights to Atlanta.

Dionte moves in for a hug. He doesn't see her suspicious look.

DIONTE (CONT'D)

And, you've got work to do.

Helen gently eases a step back.

HELEN

I hope this isn't goodbye.

Dionte has a confident smile.

DIONTE

Oh, I think we'll see each other again.

Helen kisses Dionte on the lips (not a very long kiss).

Dionte looks either disappointed or sad as he turns to grab his suitcase and briefcase. Helen smiles weakly.

HELEN

Text me and let me know what's up.

Helen opens the door for him. They kiss again, and Dionte walks away.

EXT. HELEN'S CONDO - CONTINUOUS

Dionte hears Ellen's door lock. He keeps walking as he looks around suspiciously.

INT. POLICE STATION, CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Helen walks in to see the murder board against the wall. Agents Wilcox, Edwards, and Schmidt examine case files. They each have shiny AirBook computers. Agent Wilcox doesn't look up from her laptop.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Detective, if you could focus on the two local murders, that would be great.

HELEN

With all due respect, and no one ever means that when they say it, I'll let the evidence drive my investigation, wherever it takes me.

Interpol Agent Schmidt chuckles under his breath and speaks with a strong German accent.

AGENT SCHMIDT

The FBI is following the cryptocurrency angle, although evidence of extortion is nonexistent at this time.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

I'm not at liberty to discuss outside cases that may or may not involve cryptocurrency.

HELEN

Wrench attacks. I understand how they work. But I'm puzzled by the fact that Suzi Martin's purse contained several hundred dollars in cash and three untouched gold cards, so I'll leave the robbery angle to you folks.

AGENT EDWARDS

We found Officer Alberti's fingerprints on her handbag and phone.

Helen points to Officer Alberti's photo.

HELEN

Officer Alberti is inexperienced, but he's a straight-up cop. He had the opportunity to nick a few bills from the purse he found, but he never would.

The Medical Examiner, Jane, knocks on the closed door.

Helen leaps to open it and is handed a file by Jane.

JANE

We ID'd your Jane Doe #1.
(smiles)
Though I wish they would quit calling them Jane.

Helen thumbs through the report.

JANE (CONT'D)

The vic was Dr. Sheryl Ellis, from Palo Alto. We contacted her father, Winston, who ID'd the remains. Dr. Ellis created the Med-help app and made millions.

HELEN

That's the app that guides women to health clinics, OB-GYN doctors--

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
(interrupts rudely)
Abortions and midwives! We know
about her work. We have ours to do.

HELEN
Thanks, Jane. Anything out of the
ordinary?

JANE
Besides being totally shaved? Yes,
we found evidence that both her
femurs were put in a vice. It must
have been excruciatingly painful.
You have a real nutcase out there.

Helen hugs Jane.

HELEN
Thanks, Jane.

Helen shuts the door.

AGENT EDWARDS
I'll see if she was a Crypto
holder.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
Klaus, can you see if her app was
widely used outside the US?

AGENT SCHMIDT
Will do.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
Detective, please bring Dr. Dionte
Jackson in for an interview.
(points to his photo)
I trust no one.

HELEN
He went to see Mrs. Martin.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
(snarky)
Then he should be easy for you to
find.

Helen shakes her head in disgust as she exits.

EXT. HELEN'S SEDAN - AFTERNOON

Demonic sounds whisper.

Helen stops outside Mrs. Martin's house.

She knocks on the door and rings the doorbell, but there is no answer.

She looks around in the bushes and is horrified to find Beverly's purse.

She puts latex gloves on, checks the purse quickly, and calls 9-1-1.

HELEN

Put out an APB for Councilwoman Beverly Martin. Her car keys are with her purse.

Helen calls Dionte on her hands-free phone.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Dionte, where are you?

DIONTE (V.O.)

Mrs. Martin agreed to meet at a coffee shop, but she hasn't shown up yet.

HELEN

What coffee shop? I'll join you. I'm heading your direction.

SILENCE

DIONTE (V.O.)

(suspicious)

First, you asked me where I was, then you said that you were heading my direction.

HELEN

I know Mrs. Martin's address, I assumed--

DIONTE (V.O.)

I think we shouldn't meet right now.

HELEN

How about dinner later? Nick's diner at seven?

Helen glances at her phone to see her location (a blue triangle) and Dionte's location as a red blinking dot. There is a lone road and mapped vegetation (green on the map).

HELEN (CONT'D)
Special Agent Wilcox wanted your
advice on the three-week-old vic.

DIONTE (V.O.)
She tried to call, but I was busy.

Helen sees that the red blinking dot is now moving fast in
her direction.

Helen begins to turn around on the narrow road.

HELEN
I'll head back to the station.
Where's dinner tonight?

Helen sees the red dot getting closer. She ends the call and
yells.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Call Special Agent Wilcox.

Wilcox answers in a bad mood.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (V.O.)
Yes, Detective.

HELEN
Dr. Jackson is pursuing me down the
Topanga Canyon Road. Track both our
phones and send backup, now.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (V.O.)
Your APB on Councilwoman Martin has
thrown this place into chaos.

HELEN
She's in great danger.

She turns on her body cam, takes her phone and puts it on
record, and slips it down between her seat and the console
(the most difficult to retrieve a phone).

Seconds later, a red pickup truck, driven by Tod Stevens,
zooms in from a crossroad and hits the front of Helen's
sedan, sending it down an embankment.

NIGHT

It's dark, and Helen is beside her sedan, unconscious. Her
body cam has been ripped off her.

Her car door is open, and the steering wheel and side-door airbags are deployed. Mrs. Martin's purse in the driver's seat is gone.

An ambulance with lights flashing is up on the road.

A Hispanic MALE EMT (20s) and a FEMALE EMT (30s) Muslim wearing a hijab, race downslope to Helen.

The female EMT checks Helen's pulse.

FEMALE EMT

We have a pulse. I'm Layla. What's your name?

Layla shakes Helen gently, and Helen's eyes open a little.

FEMALE EMT (CONT'D)

You've been in an accident. I'm Layla. What's your name?

HELEN

I'm... Helen.

FEMALE EMT

Don't move too quickly. Follow my instructions if you can do so without pain. Can you move your fingers?

Helen moves her fingers.

HELEN

My phone. I need my phone.

FEMALE EMT

Can you move your toes?

HELEN

Not well. They are in my shoes.

FEMALE EMT

Are you in pain? Do you think you broke any bones?

HELEN

I feel sore but not broken. I need my phone. Please. Help me up, slowly, please. It's between the driver's seat and the console.

MALE EMT

I hate that when my phone gets stuck there.

The EMTs help Helen up. She stares at the open car door.

The Male EMT holds Helen, but needs Layla's help.

HELEN

I hope the phone is still recording
after--

(yells)

After two hours?

MALE EMT

Do you want me to get your phone?

Helen is still dizzy.

HELEN

Thanks. You work hard enough. I'll
get it later.

The EMTs help Helen up to the roadside.

A tow truck arrives to pull Helen's sedan up the embankment

HELEN (CONT'D)

Thanks for pulling me out of there.

FEMALE EMT

You were unconscious. Someone else
pulled you out, but those two
airbags are the things that saved
your life.

Special Agent Wilcox and Agents Edwards and Schmidt race to
the scene in a black SUV with lights and sirens.

MALE EMT

You should get checked out by a
doctor.

HELEN

Maybe later.

The Agents race to Helen.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Are you okay?

HELEN

I'm fine. Someone dragged me out of
my car and stole my body cam.

Agent Schmidt is strongly unconvinced.

AGENT SCHMIDT
We have no reason to assume this.

HELEN
I put my phone on audio memo. I
need to get my phone from between
the driver's seat and the console.

AGENT SCHMIDT
I'll get it.

AGENT EDWARDS
I'm closer. I'll get it.

Agent Edwards races down to the sedan. Agent Schmidt gives up
after a few steps.

Agent Edwards digs down into the car's interior. He grunts
and swears.

AGENT EDWARDS (CONT'D)
I hate this when it happens to me.
(elated)
I got it. I got it.

Agent Edwards races back upslope and hands it to Helen.

HELEN
Thanks, Agent Edwards. I knew they
wouldn't find it there.

AGENT EDWARDS
Call me Max.

They share a moment.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
You knew you were in trouble.

AGENT EDWARDS
Brilliant move.

Helen plays back the audio.

TOD (V.O.)
There's her purse. The phone's got
to be here somewhere!

HELEN
That's Tod Steven's voice!

DIONTE (V.O.)
Hurry, we gotta go!

Helen's eyes open wide.

HELEN

That's Dr. Dionte Jackson! We have to hurry to save Mrs. Martin. I'm guessing she's being tortured as we speak.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

That's a needle in a haystack!

HELEN

They're panicking. They'll use a nearby location. The Malibu location where we found her daughter!

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

We'll take it from here. You're in no shape--

HELEN

I'm going. I've been to that crime scene. You need me, and we don't have much time. We have to find Mrs. Martin before they hang her.

AGENT EDWARDS

I'll help you to the car. Let's go.

Agent Edwards helps Helen into their black SUV.

Agent Schmidt reluctantly gets in the SUV.

The SUV speeds away.

EXT. RANCH - NIGHT

Demonic sounds fill the night.

All the officers exit the SUV in bulletproof vests. Klaus, the Crypto Security Officer from Interpol, stays in the car but rolls down a window to listen in.

Helen whispers to Special Agent Wilcox.

HELEN

You and I will take point. You have a body cam.

(to Agent Edwards)

If they open with ARs, keep a safe distance behind, and call for backup.

Edwards nods, "Yes."

Helen slowly and quietly follows her flashlight beam past two vehicles. The first is Tod Steven's red truck with significant damage to the front bumper.

Agent Edwards takes photos without the flash on.

Helen walks past a black SUV. She pauses.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. HELEN'S SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

The street has little traffic. Helen exits the parking lot behind the station onto a dark, nearly empty side street.

She sees the lights on a dark SUV across the street light up as she drives along.

The SUV keeps a safe distance back, but Helen sees it in her rearview mirror.

END FLASHBACK

Helen peeks in the back of the SUV and sees Dionte's suitcase, partially covered by a blanket.

Officer Alberti sneaks up on the group with a powerful rifle and shocks everyone before they see his police uniform.

He steps quietly to Helen and whispers.

OFFICER ALBERTI

I heard you on the scanner. I'm
here for backup.

Helen gives him an okay sign and sends him to the back of the group.

Helen waves for everyone to follow her.

Agent Schmidt sneaks out of the SUV, takes out his phone, and snaps a photo of the SUV's license plate with his flash on!

Special Agent Wilcox slaps his shoulder and sends him back to the SUV. Klaus apologizes with a shrug.

Officer Alberti glances at Klaus as he returns to the SUV.

The team follows Helen and pulls their pistols.

Demonic sounds fill the night.

Helen quietly leads them toward a campfire in a dark patch of oak trees. Mrs. Martin is gagged and tied with her arms behind her. Her fingernails are bleeding.

Helen pulls Special Agent Wilcox to her side to get video on her body cam.

Two men dressed in black and with black masks and gloves are barely recognizable to Helen, but she glares at them through night-vision binoculars.

She motions with her hands for Special Agent Wilcox to follow her, and Agent Edwards to take the right flank, and Officer Alberti to take the left flank.

Office Alberti's eyes open wide, but he follows his instructions.

Agent Edwards takes the right flank immediately.

Helen and Special Agent Wilcox wait for the officers to get in position.

The masked men (Dionte and Tod Stevens) have a climbing rope strung over an oak tree branch and begin to tie Mrs. Martin's hands to the rope to hoist her up in a strappado position.

The men hoist her up to where Mrs. Martin is on her tiptoes.

Helen yells at the top of her lungs.

HELEN

Freeze! This is the police! We have you surrounded.

Dionte freezes and puts his hand up.

Tod panics and takes off running away from Helen's voice.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

He takes only two steps before he falls dead.

Helen is furious and yells.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Hold your fire. They're not going anywhere!

Helen races to rescue Mrs. Martin, while Special Agent Wilcox pulls off Dionte's mask and places handcuffs on him.

Dionte wobbles on his legs and doesn't speak. Then blood trickles from his mouth.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You're going to be okay, Mrs. Martin. Agent Edwards, call for an ambulance.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

You're under arrest, Dr. Jackson. You have the right to remain silent...

HELEN

(yells)

Agent Edwards? Did you call 9-1-1?

Helen glances at Dionte and sees blood trickling from his mouth.

Dionte falls to the ground, dead.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Get behind an oak tree, quick.

BAM!

AGENT SCHMIDT (O.C.)

That won't be necessary. I killed the gunman.

Agent Schmidt crashes through a thicket of bushes to reach Helen, Special Agent Wilcox, and Mrs. Martin.

AGENT SCHMIDT (CONT'D)

I don't think any of us were supposed to survive this night.

Helen puts on latex gloves and pulls out several evidence bags, while Mrs. Martin sobs with relief.

Mrs Martin moves to hug Agent Schmidt, distracting him as Helen knocks his pistol down and handcuffs him with ninja-type speed.

BEVERLY MARTIN

All of you, thank you for... saving my life?

She sees Agent Schmidt in handcuffs.

HELEN

Agent Schmidt spoke the truth when he said none of us were supposed to survive the night.

Helen makes a call on her radio.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Dispatch, this is Detective Helen Thanos. Please send an ambulance, CSI Team, and Coroner to my location.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Copy that.

Agent Edwards stumbles out of the dark, holding his side.

Helen races to hug him.

HELEN

Max, you're okay!

AGENT EDWARDS

I heard the first rifle shot when I was about to step out from behind an oak tree, and I froze.

HELEN

Good thing you did.

AGENT EDWARDS

The shot grazed my side and spun me around and down. The vest saved my life.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Would you mind explaining to me what the hell happened here?

BEVERLY MARTIN

Why did they kill my daughter and almost kill me?

HELEN

I think I have most of the story. Agent Schmidt may have to fill in a few details.

AGENT SCHMIDT

I don't think so. I want my lawyer.

Helen gazes into the fire.

HELEN

A few days ago, Dr. Jackson took me to see the "*Malleus Maleficarum*," a text from 1487, written by a German Dominican named Heinrich Kramer. Isn't that right, Agent Schmidt? From your hometown of Teir.

Agent Schmidt's eyes open wide, but he remains silent as Helen explains.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE LIBRARY - NIGHT

Demonic sounds fill the room.

Mrs. Mueller thumbs through the old book.

HELEN (V.O.)

It's known as "The Hammer of Witches" and details how witches are identified, tortured, and made to confess, and turn over their property to their Inquisitor, before being hanged and later burned. Between 40,000 and 60,000 witches, 95% female, lost their lives and property because of that dangerous text.

BEVERLY MARTIN (V.O.)

I denied being a witch, but Dr. Jackson said all witches deny the truth.

Mrs. Mueller thumbs through the old book.

HELEN (V.O.)

Did they torture you for your Cryptocurrency passcodes?

BEVERLY MARTIN (V.O.)

I denied owning any Crypto, but the young man said all witches lie about that, too. I told them everything after the thumbscrews.

Dionte backs up in the room, frightened of the text.

HELEN (V.O.)

Dr. Jackson was almost frightened to death, but in a good way for him. It justified his most secret and evil obsession.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. RANCH - CONTINUOUS

The demonic sounds are gone.

Helen glares at Dionte's dead body.

HELEN

The first abduction, torture, and murder was three weeks ago. The striking similarities in all three murders and Mrs. Martin's abduction, torture, and attempted murder were the work of Tod Stevens and Dionte Jackson, who had entirely different motives.

AGENT SCHMIDT

Conjecture!

HELEN

The first victim had signs that leg clamps were used to extract a confession and crypt accounts -- that was Tod's handiwork.

AGENT SCHMIDT

Conjecture!

BEVERLY MARTIN

That's who put the thumbscrews on me.

HELEN

But it was Dr. Jackson who shaved her entire body to look for birthmarks, a sure sign of being a witch.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

That's ridiculous. 20-30% of adults have noticeable birthmarks.

HELEN

Agent Schmidt admitted that she had Crypto. But how could he know that?

Agent Schmidt looks away.

HELEN (CONT'D)

We know the least about the second victim in Idaho, but the Sheriff claimed she was very wealthy and her husband was unemployed. When we checked her financial records, she showed a massive stock portfolio with holdings in cryptocurrency.

(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

However, crypto thieves have a more difficult time extracting funds from brokers, so they moved on to Suzi.

Mrs. Martin cries.

HELEN (CONT'D)

She confessed to owning one Crypto account, but she actually owned six accounts. Isn't that right, Agent Schmidt?

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Agent Schmidt assured me that Interpol was only interested in something called rug pulling in Teir, Germany, linked to a few Americans and organized crime in Dubai.

AGENT EDWARDS

Rug pulling?

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Illegally shaving commissions off of cryptocurrency transactions, or stealing them outright. Many investors get wiped out overnight.

BEVERLY MARTIN

She told them one of her accounts, but I inherited the other five after her death. She put me on the accounts without telling me. I didn't know!

HELEN

But someone did? Didn't you, Agent Schmidt?

Demonic sounds fill the night.

Officer Alberti crashes through the bushes with his rifle aimed at Helen. He's wobbling, and his face is breaking out with a red rash. He's bleeding from the right side of his neck, next to the strap of his bulletproof vest.

Agent Schmidt's eyes open wide in horror!

HELEN (CONT'D)

I'm glad you're alive, Officer Alberti!

OFFICER ALBERTI
He got me on the side of the
shoulder strap, the weakest part of
the bulletproof vest.

AGENT SCHMIDT
(sarcastic)
Lucky for us, huh?

OFFICER ALBERTI
Lucky for me. I surrender.

Officer Alberti shoots Agent Schmidt in the heart, tosses
down his rifle, and then throws his arms in the air.

OFFICER ALBERTI (CONT'D)
Don't shoot. I surrender.

Special Agent Wilcox and Agent Edwards separate from each
other and aim their pistols at Officer Alberti's head.

Officer Alberti points to the body cam on Special Agent
Wilcox.

OFFICER ALBERTI (CONT'D)
We're on her body cam and on mine.

Agent Edwards cuffs him.

HELEN
You have the right...

OFFICER ALBERTI
I waive my Miranda Rights. I have a
top-shelf legal team.

HELEN
You shot three and killed three
people tonight!

Officer Alberti points to Tod and Dionte.

OFFICER ALBERTI
Two serial killers, one armed.

Agent Edwards checks for a pulse on Tod.

AGENT EDWARDS
He's dead.

HELEN
Check for a weapon.

Officer Alberti points to Agent Schmidt.

OFFICER ALBERTI

A lowly-paid Interpol Crypto-security agent who was probably skimming off the top. The fleeing culprit was pulling a gun on me. It was self-defense.

Agent Edwards returns to the fire holding a Swiss Army knife and thumbscrews in his blue latex gloves.

AGENT EDWARDS

No firearm.

HELEN

And he was fleeing.

OFFICER ALBERTI

Did you check his cowboy boots?

Agent Edwards returns to Tod's body and inspects his boots.

AGENT EDWARDS

No firearm!

HELEN

How did you know he'd be wearing cowboy boots?

Helen has an epiphany.

Helen gets on her radio.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Dispatch, this is Detective Helen Thanos. Can you look up Officer Arthur Alberti's home address for me? I think he may be in some danger.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Will do, Detective.

OFFICER ALBERTI

It's 27367 Mountain Crest Road in Malibu. Let the record show that the arrested party is being fully cooperative.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

We have three residential addresses on file, Detective. One is 27367 Mountain Crest Road, Malibu--

HELEN

Dispatch, that's all I need for now. Special thanks.

(to Agent Edwards)

Would you mind bringing me the phones of the two dead masked men?

Officer Alberti's eyes open wide.

Agent Edwards leaps to Tod.

Special Agent Wilcox keeps her pistol on Officer Alberti, but adjusts her aim to his genital area.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Don't do anything foolish, officer.

I know what these vests do and don't cover.

Officer Alberti begins to perspire, and the rash on his face gets worse.

HELEN

Oh darn, did I send you on the left flank, the side that had all the poison oak? My bad.

Officer Alberti panics.

OFFICER ALBERTI

You knew I was highly allergic!

HELEN

I trusted you until tonight. I forgave you in my mind for picking up Suzi's purse without latex gloves on. You weren't making a rookie mistake; you were covering up for Tod or Dione. You wiped the purse clean first. I should have figured that out when Suzi's prints weren't anywhere on her purse. And you were all too dumb to know the high tide line.

Agent Edwards returns with Tod's phone in a transparent evidence bag.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Thanks, Max.

Helen checks his phone while she speaks.

OFFICER ALBERTI

That's an illegal search and seizure. Fourth Amendment!

HELEN

The Fourth Amendment doesn't apply to a deceased victim in a murder investigation. That will be on your Sergeant's Exam, if you can take it from prison.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

She's right. And I hear they love bad cops in prison.

HELEN

I noticed when we brought in Mr. Stevens for his preliminary interview that he didn't open his phone with a code. I connected his phone to my "Find my Phone" group by accident, while he pretended not to know Dr. Jackson. They were both very fine actors.

(in Officer Alberti's face)

And guess where he returned to that night.

Officer Alberti looks away.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

27367 Mountain Crest Road, Malibu.

HELEN

Exactly.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Oooh oooh. Check and see who's on speed dial!

HELEN

After a proper warrant.

OFFICER ALBERTI

Get me the EpiPen that's in my car!

Everyone stares at Officer Alberti's face.

AGENT EDWARDS

He looks puffy, very swollen.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

He looks like he's about to pop.

They HEAR SIRENS approaching.

HELEN
Help is on the way.

OFFICER ALBERTI
Not fast enough! If I go into
anaphylactic shock, I could die!

HELEN
Tell us why you did it! Why did you
get yourself involved?

Office Alberti is desperate.

OFFICER ALBERTI
Dr. Jackson hunted down Tod for his
modern-day witch hunts. He was a
nut case who believed smart women
were taking over the world. He was
going to burn the witch tonight to
purify our community! Now, get me
my EpiPen!

Mrs. Martin kicks Officer Alberti hard.

BEVERLY MARTIN
Sick bastards. You're all sick
bastards.

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX
How did Klaus Schmidt get involved?

OFFICER ALBERTI
He really was skimming off the top
of crypto transactions, rounding
them off in a way that sent small
residuals of the rounding off
function to his crypto holdings. He
was going good but not great, so he
wanted in on the wrench attacks.

BEVERLY MARTIN
So he was just a thief?

HELEN
He was an accomplice to multiple
murders.

Mrs. Martin kicks Agent Schmidt hard.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Did Dr. Jackson get in on the
crypto thefts?

OFFICER ALBERTI

He thought cryptocurrency was the work of the Devil. He was a misogynistic zealot. He was a lunatic doing God's work like his role model -- the guy who wrote the "Hammer of Witches."

Mrs. Martin kicks Dr. Jackson hard.

BEVERLY MARTIN

Sick bastard! And I trusted you! I even leased you that black SUV for a month.

HELEN

He pretended to fly into LAX so he could track my whereabouts. And he and Tod could have committed all three abductions and murders.

(mad with herself)

I almost slept with him, but he couldn't get aroused in a shower.

OFFICER ALBERTI

(weakly)

He was a eunuch.

(yells)

I'll tell you more if you get my EpiPen.

Helen steps away from the body cam angles and removes an EpiPen from her back pocket.

Officer Alberti begs forgiveness.

OFFICER ALBERTI (CONT'D)

Don't give them the credit. I was the Inquisitor of Witches. I was the mastermind. I have plenty of money, but I kept getting passed over for promotions; smarter women always won.

(evil smile)

Until now!

HELEN

Such a shame. So you and your team of misogynist torturers and murderers began to resurrect the witch hunts of the 15th through 17th centuries? The good ol' days!

Officer Alberti weakens and collapses to the ground.

Helen takes an EpiPen out of her back pocket and sticks Officer Alberti's upper thigh.

HELEN (CONT'D)

He'll be fine in ten to twenty minutes.

The SIRENS get louder.

INT. POLICE STATION, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The Chief, Helen, and FBI agents Wilcox and Edwards. They all have smiles on their faces. The Chief sounds and acts like a proud, male chauvinist who reads from prepared notes.

CHIEF

I'd like to thank you all for your excellent work solving three horrific murders and almost a fourth one. Mrs. Beverly Martin wants to personally thank Special Agent Victoria Wilcox of the FBI. Interpol, and all of you, really.

The smile fades from Helen's face, but Special Agent Wilcox glows.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

I'm told that your team efficiently dispatched those three horrible men.

HELEN

Three?

The Chief sees that Helen is growing angry.

CHIEF

As a reward, Beverly would like to invite you all to her daughter's "Celebration of Life," where there will be those little sandwiches and peanut butter pretzels that everyone enjoys.

SILENCE

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX

Also, Interpol Agent Klaus Schmidt's crypto assets will be directed to women's charities.

(MORE)

SPECIAL AGENT WILCOX (CONT'D)

And, our FBI crypto team was able to recover 75% of Suzi Martin's Crypto.

CHIEF

That's not the fault of law enforcement. Cryptocurrencies can be fickle.

(laughs)

I know mine are.

HELEN

That's true, Chief. Mrs. Martin told me last night that she's liquidating all of her Crypto holdings at a little over 50% of their purchase price. She is going to create an endowment for young women entrepreneurs in Suzi's name.

CHIEF

I spoke with her this morning and cautioned her about rash decisions. Wait until Crypto takes off again. Buy low, sell high. She thanked me for the advice. Oh, and the insurance company handling the case in Idaho is trying to go after Dr. Jackson's heirs.

HELEN

(snickers)

Good luck with that.

CHIEF

Our press statement on the case will stress that we still have a lot of crazies out there, but that no one is foolish enough to believe that smart women are to blame for the world's problems.

HELEN

Chief, only the perps in the case thought that!

CHIEF

Exactly my point. There aren't any witches anymore.

HELEN

There never were any witches.

CHIEF

That's the spirit, Detective.
(to blank faces)
So let's get back out there and
protect our city.

The Chief whispers.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Off the record, we couldn't hold
that nice young police officer,
Arthur Alberti.

Helen stands, rightly upset.

HELEN

What?

CHIEF

He's very rich and has a stable of
lawyers you wouldn't believe. He's
never held cryptocurrency, says he
shot only in self-defense while
performing his assigned duties from
Detective Helen Thanos, and claims
he saved your lives. He showed us
his body cam of Detective Thanos
throwing a huge rock into Suzi
Martin's car window. His lawyers
argue that any body cam footage you
have will be inadmissible. The
Mayor wants to give him a citation.
His lawyers posted bail in a
heartbeat, but don't you worry.
He'll be under house arrest under
his own recognizance until all this
is resolved.

The others are too stunned to speak.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an
early tee time.

He nods and mutters, but they all hear him.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

The Devil and witches? Ha! Smart
women taking over the world? Never!

Demonic sounds fill the office as he exits.

HELEN (V.O.)
Maybe we've been misidentifying the
real witches all along! We need to
stop the witch-hunters!"

FADE OUT.

THE END