

Love of a Woman

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It was a cloudy Tuesday morning when Maria, senior prosecutor in the New York district attorney and her friend Alice, a parole officer, walked on 6th Ave toward the West 4th Street subway entrance located in Greenwich Village, in New York City. Maria, a slim 5' 4" woman with long black silky hair down to her shoulders and expressive black eyes, wore a tailored, dark gray suit, white shirt and a string of white pearls around her neck. Alice, petit 5' 2" woman with short blond hair and brown eyes, had the figure of a marathon runner. She wore a blue wind breaker that had NY Police Department insignia on it, jeans and sneakers. Under the jacket, she wore a bullet proof vest and had a 38 police special on her hip. Before going down the subway steps Maria glanced at the newspaper stand and saw the Post Newspaper's gruesome picture of a man wearing a white jacket lying on the floor in a pool of blood. The front-page headline said, 'Another robbery in New York City.' Maria stared at the picture and told Alice "It's the fourth armed robbery this month. This time it ended in a murder. The media will have a field day saying the police department is ineffective."

"It's the reality we have to live with." Alice responded, taking Maria's hand and leading her down the subway steps.

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Maria walked into her office holding the coffee she bought at Starbucks and found the police report on her desk. The coffee was left untouched when she leafed through the

folder and looked at the gruesome pictures the photographer took. The robbery took place the day before at a pharmacy in Greenwich Village. The gunman, who wore a black ski mask, walked into the pharmacy at 6 p.m., pointed a 38-special automatic pistol at the pharmacist and told him, "Open the cash register and give me the money."

The pharmacist hesitated for a second, wondering if he should press the alarm bottom connected to the police 6th precinct on West 10th Street. The gunman, who guessed what pharmacist was going to do, fired a burst of bullets that wounded him and two customers, a middle age man and a young woman, who stood by the counter waiting for their prescriptions to be filled. The gunman ignored the customers who were screaming, walked behind the counter and saw the pharmacist lying on his back staring up at him. His white jacket had a big red stain on his chest and a stream of blood came out of his mouth as he tried to breathe. The gunman gave him a brief look, bent down, put the gun muzzle against his forehead and said before squeezing the trigger, "You should have opened the cash register and given me the money."

Next the gunman pulled out of his wind breaker pocket a D'Agostino Supermarket plastic bag, opened the cash register draw and filled it with the money he found. Before he walked out the door he fired a few warning shots in the air and ran to the subway entrance located on the corner. It was recorded on the pharmacy's security cameras, but it didn't help because the ski mask the gunman wore covered his entire face.

As Maria guessed, the newspapers had a field day writing about the police's inability to protect New York City citizens from such events and splashed the gruesome picture across on their front page. Preoccupied, Maria stared at Uncle Terry's 8x10 black

and white photograph located at corner of her desk. Her eyes filled with tears as she remembered his funeral a couple of years earlier after he had been gunned down in a dark street in Boston by a drug dealer he tried to arrest. The picture had been taken when Maria graduated from Columbia University Law School. She wore a black graduation gown and hat. Uncle Terry, a 6' 4" muscular man, had his arm around her slim shoulder and it looked like a giant hugged her. At the lower left corner of the mat he wrote in his neat handwriting, "*Little Princess. I'm proud of you for not letting what happened stop you from achieving your goal.*"

Uncle Terry, who had been a Boston Police detective, was the reason why Maria chose to become a criminal lawyer. Frustrated, she said in a loud voice, "*Uncle Terry, how would you go about finding him?*"

Alice, who entered the office to discuss one of her parolees Maria was going to trial that afternoon said, "By now he would have found the gunman." Maria gave her a faint smile, remembering the day Uncle Terry had told her father, "*You must accept the fact that Alice is Maria's lover. By doing it you'll gain another daughter rather than lose Maria.*"

* * *

Maria was born in Bensonhurst, known as a Brooklyn Little Italy, because of its large Italian population. Her grandparents came from Sicily after World War II and chose to live in the neighborhood because it reminded them the small village from which they came. Maria's parents felt they should live next to their aging parents. After the grandparents died, her parents decided to stay in the neighborhood despite the fact it

started to lose its authenticity when new immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Far East moved in. Every Sunday, Maria and her parents attended Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. It had a large statue of the Virgin Mary wearing a green rope surrounded by gold engraving on a circle, praying with a child sitting at her feet. Father Giovanni, the priest, was a 5'-foot 8" heavy set man with mild personality. He was loved and respected by the neighborhood people who often asked his advice.

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Uncle Terry married to Aunt Mary, Maria's mother's younger sister, who was her favorite person. Once a month they visited her parents and attended the Sunday Mass with them. Because Aunt Mary was unable to have children after having multiple miscarriages, they related to Maria as if she was their own daughter. The minute Uncle Terry entered the house he hugged and kissed Maria and then threw her in the air. Maria, delighted, would laugh but her mother would panic. The game ended when the mother, whose fear consumed her, grabbed Maria and wouldn't let go until Uncle Terry promised not to do it again. The next time they visited he did it again and then took Maria to the shopping mall to buy her toys she liked. After having lunch at MacDonald's, Maria's favorite restaurant, Uncle Terry took her to Coney Island Amusement Park where she sat on his broad shoulders, smiling and looking at the people they passed by. When they came home at night, Uncle Terry held shopping bags full of toys he bought for Maria and items he won at the amusement park at various shooting range. Her mother was upset and told him, "You're spoiling Maria again by buying her what she wants,"

Instead of responding he hugged the mother, kissed her and said, "My little princess deserves the best."

Frustrated, the mother threw her hands in the air and went to the kitchen followed by Aunt Mary to prepare supper. The reason why Uncle Terry gave Maria the nickname 'Little Princess' was because she was a petite pretty girl with pale skin resembling a small oriental porcelain doll. Maria's parents were proud of the fact that she was always on the dean's list. At the age of sixteen, however, Maria rebelled and wanted to meet her girlfriends instead of going to the Sunday Mass. It resulted in bitter arguments and her parents always got their way. Maria was in her senior year of high school when she finally had had it with her parents controlling her life hearing her father say, "Because you're getting straight 'A's' in biology, you should take pre-med courses in college. After you graduate apply to medical school."

"I don't want to be a doctor," Maria responded. "What would you like to do," her mother asked. "I haven't made up my mind," she responded.

It was a constant source of arguments until Maria spoke with Father Giovanni about it. The next day he met her parents in the church and told them, "Maria is too young to decide what she wants to do. She will be able to make up her mind after graduating from College."

* * *

Maria was attending her first year at Brooklyn College when her best friend invited her to a party that took place on Friday night. She refused saying, "I can't attend the party. My midterm exams are next week."

A friend who refused to take no for an answer told her, "You always study and don't have fun. You need to take a break from your studying."

At the party Maria met Anthony. He was five years older than she, had long black silky hair down to his shoulders and striking light blue eyes. They danced the entire evening and every so often he kissed her. Maria felt she had met Prince Charming and didn't mind that he hugged her tightly. When Maria told her parents that she was dating Anthony, her father got angry and said, "You should not go out with him."

"Why?" she asked.

"We have known him since he was a child. He's a high school dropout who was sent to juvenile detention because he broke into cars, took out the radios and sold them on the streets."

"I don't believe you."

"Ask Father Giovanni. He'll confirm it."

Despite the fact that Father Giovanni confirmed what her father said Maria kept dating Anthony. When Anthony picked her up he wore a dark blue blazer with brass bottoms, beige slacks and brown Salvatore Ferragamo shoes. Maria was impressed when she sat in his new Black Cadillac that had soft beige leather seats, a sun roof and a beautiful sounding stereo. Anthony often took her to nightclubs in Manhattan and paid with \$100 bills. One Friday night when he came to pick Maria up her father, who was frustrated, asked him, "How can you afford the Cadillac and the expensive clothes you're wearing?"

"I'm a broker."

“What kind of a broker?”

“Oh, I work at Merrill Lynch buying and selling penny stocks.”

That evening Anthony took Maria to Aurora, an expensive Northern Italian restaurant in Brooklyn, bought Barolo wine and encouraged her to drink. When they left the restaurant, Maria, who was not used to drinking alcohol, became lightheaded.

Anthony realized it and told her, "Let's go to my apartment. I want to show you the nice stereo I bought."

"I don't think I should"

"Don't be silly. I will take you home after you listen to my stereo."

When they entered his apartment, he turned on the stereo to a station that played soft music and told her, "I love you. We should get married after you graduate from school."

Next gave her a passionate kiss on her lips. Maria became aroused and kissed him back. Encouraged, he opened her shirt, unfastened her bra and ran his fingers over her nipples that got hard. Maria closed her eyes and let him undress her before he took her to the bedroom. At 2 a.m. she came home and found her father sitting in his recliner in the living room. Annoyed, she asked him, “Why aren't you sleeping?”

“I need to talk to you. I don't believe Anthony is a stockbroker. After you left I called Uncle Terry who confirmed my suspicions. He feels Anthony is doing something illegal and will check into it.”

“Don't interfere in my life. I'm no longer your little girl.”

Her father's face was pale when he kissed her on the forehead and went upstairs. Maria, stressed that her father was upset, told herself, *'I'm not going to stop seeing Anthony just because my father and Uncle Terry don't approve of it.'*

* * *

Her paradigm shattered when she found out that she was pregnant. In the evening she met Anthony at his apartment and told him, "I saw the gynecologist today. He told me that I'm three months pregnant."

"I know a midwife who can perform the abortion."

"I can't believe you said that. You kept telling me that you loved me and that we would get married after I graduate from college."

"I never planned to marry you. You wouldn't have slept with me if I hadn't said it."

"You're a son of a bitch. I don't want to see you again."

Her mother cried hearing the bad news and her father's hand shook when he called Father Giovanni. The next day they met Anthony and his parents at the church. Anthony's face was pale hearing Father Giovanni say, "The two of you should get married right away before Maria's pregnancy shows."

Happy, she tried to hug Anthony and felt his muscular body tense before he pushed her away. The Friday before the wedding Anthony took Maria to dinner at the exclusive Coach House restaurant located at the south side of Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village. When they were seated at their table Anthony told her, "This restaurant requires reservation weeks in advance."

"How did you manage to get reservation so fast?"

"I have good connections."

Maria was uncomfortable seeing the men dressed in dark suits and the women in evening dresses. When she opened the menu that the waiter placed on the table she told Anthony, "Why are we eating here? It's a very expensive restaurant."

"Business is booming and I can't meet my clients' demands."

At that moment Maria remembered her father words, '*Uncle Terry confirmed my suspicion. He feels that Anthony is doing something illegal and is going to check into it.*'

Her train of thought was interrupted when Anthony gave her an intense look and said, "You must have the abortion. I'm not ready to be a father."

"It's a sin. I won't do it."

"You will be sorry if I'm forced to marry you."

The tears formed in Maria's eyes and she was ready to leave the restaurant.

Anthony realizing it, held her hand and smiled. It reminded her of past happy days until she heard him say, "Be smart and have the abortion. You're too young to be a mother."

"I can't. I spoke with Father Giovanni about it. He said we should get married right away."

* * *

On the way to the garage Anthony suddenly stopped walking. "What's the matter?" Maria asked. "I'm not going to marry you on Sunday," he replied.

"You must! In six months I'll have your baby."

Anthony didn't respond, made a fist, and punched her in the stomach. She doubled up and fell on the sidewalk crying. He laughed, kicked her in the groin and said, "Maybe this will help you get rid of the baby."

Several people who were walking their dogs in Washington Square Park saw what happened and ran over to surrounded them. One of them who walked a Dalmatian said, "We should call the police."

"It's none of your goddamned business," Anthony snapped at him. Ready to leave he grabbed Maria's long hair forcing her to stand up. The man who had a big male Rottweiler on a short leash told Anthony, "Buddy, you're not leaving. If you do I'll give my dog a command and he'll attack you."

The dog, sensing the tension growled, curled his lip and his large white teeth gleamed. Anthony, realizing he was in trouble, raised his right hand and said, "We're getting married on Sunday and had an argument about the wedding plans."

The Rottweiler owner wasn't fooled and told him, "Tell it to the police. If you move I'll let go on the leash and my dog will rip your ass apart."

The man who had a Dalmatian entered the phone booth and picked the phone to call 911. Maria, who didn't want the police getting involved, entered the booth, put her hand on the phone mouthpiece and said "Don't call the police. We'll be getting married on Sunday."

The baffled man left the phone booth with Maria following him. "Let's go home," she told Anthony as she took his hand and walked him out of the circle of men and dogs that surrounded them. When they reached the 8th street garage where Anthony's car was

parked, he punched her in the stomach again. She lost her balance and fell against the metal railing of a brownstone staircase feeling sharp pain in her face. After she got into the car, he ignored her and drove fast to the Westside Highway. She touched her face, saw blood on her hand, looked in the visor mirror and got scared at seeing a big bruise on her forehead. Maria gently wiped off the blood with her handkerchief, wondering how she'd explain it to her parents. Anthony saw it, laughed and said. "It serves you right. Maybe you'll end up with a permanent scar on your beautiful face."

The minute she walked into the house her mother saw the bruise, got scared and screamed, "Maria, what happened?"

"I tripped and fell against brownstone stairway handle in the Village."

Neither her mother nor father believed her but didn't say a word. Her mother rushed to the kitchen, took ice cubes out of the freezer and wrapped them in a wet towel. She made Maria lie on the couch and put the towel on her bruised face. Uncle Terry and Aunt Mary, who were staying with Maria's parents that weekend, walked into the house holding wedding presents. The minute Uncle Terry saw the bruise that was blue and dark purple he said, "Little Princess, tell me what happened."

Maria repeated the story she told her parents. Uncle Terry didn't say a word, bent on his knees and gave her a close look. His face was red when he asked, "Did Anthony beat you up?"

She couldn't lie to him, cried and described what happened. He made a fist and the muscles in his arm moved when he told her parents, "Little Princess shouldn't marry Anthony. He'll make her life miserable."

Her mother shrieked, "Maria must marry him. She is going to have his baby."

Before anybody could respond, Maria felt strong cramps in her abdomen. Her mother's panicky voice sounded far away when she asked her what the matter. Unable to answer, Maria put her hand on her stomach. Uncle Terry moved fast across the room, called 911 and asked for an ambulance. The next morning Maria lost the baby. When she left the hospital, she found out from the nurse who released her that her parents, uncle and aunt, stayed in the waiting room all night. Maria was at home, lying in her bed, when she heard Uncle Terry speak on the phone with his friend John who was a detective in the NYPD. She got out of bed, walked into the living room and heard the end of the conversation, "Anthony, the guy I spoke with you about, beat up my niece and caused her to miscarry. I think he's selling drugs. He claims he's working at Merrill Lynch selling penny stocks. I called their human resource department and asked if he works for them. They told me they don't have records of his employment. Do me a favor; ask the Narcs to check him out."

* * *

Uncle Terry was ready to leave the house when Aunt Mary stopped him at the door and asked, "Where're you going?"

"To find the son of a bitch and teach him a lesson he'll never forget."

Maria's mother pleaded, "Please don't. We should call the police."

"I'm the police," he responded as Aunt Mary grabbed his arm trying to prevent him from leaving. He pushed her and she almost lost her balance. He moved fast and caught her. "I'll join you," Maria's Father told Uncle Terry before he walked out the door.

It was late afternoon when they came back. Uncle Terry's shirt had bloodstains all over it. "Did you beat up Anthony?" Aunt Mary asked him. He didn't respond, opened the closet door, selected slacks, a shirt and underwear before he entered the bathroom to take a shower. "What happened?" Maria's mother asked her husband. "Uncle Terry parked his car in front of the building where Anthony lives. He came out, saw Uncle Terry getting out of his car and started to run. I never saw anybody move so fast. He caught up with him at the corner, grabbed his shoulder, turned him around and punched him in his stomach. Anthony bent forward and Uncle Terry started punching his face with both fists. The neighbors who saw it called 911. A few minutes later the police car arrived up and called the ambulance who took Anthony to the Coney Island hospital emergency room."

"Did they arrest Uncle Terry?"

"No. They were going to before he showed them his Boston detective gold shield and told them what Anthony had done. The sergeant called Anthony's parents, asked them to come to the emergency room and told Uncle Terry that he would have broken Anthony's neck instead of just punching his face. Then he offered to drive us home. Uncle Terry thanked him and said his car was parked around the corner."

Maria's mother was shocked hearing about Uncle Terry's violent temper. Aunt Mary wasn't and was going to say something when he came out of the bathroom. He overheard the end of the conversation and said, "I taught the son of a bitch a lesson he will never forget. Most likely he will need plastic surgery and no longer be good looking."

Two months later an undercover narcotics cop caught Anthony selling drugs in Washington Square Park and he was sentenced to three years in jail. Maria, unable to go back to school, stayed home crying. Her parents, not knowing what to do with her, felt it would be best if she stayed with Uncle Terry and Aunt Mary in Boston. Every evening Uncle Terry took Maria for a long walk along the Charles River. At one of the walks she started to cry. Uncle Terry made her sit on a bench and put his arm around her shoulder trying to comfort her. After she stopped crying he told her, "Little Princess, I don't think you should go back to Brooklyn. I spoke with your parents about enrolling you in Boston College. They felt it's a good idea."

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Maria always sat by herself in the cafeteria, often starting at her food and not touching it. When somebody approached and asked her to go out on a date she sadly smiled and said, "I'm sorry, I can't."

The male students stopped asking and the female students viewed her as a loner who kept to herself. One afternoon she was eating her lunch in the school cafeteria when a female student came to her table and asked, "Would you mind if I sit at your table?"

Maria's first reaction was to refuse, but realizing that no other tables were available, she agreed by nodding her head. The student smiled and said, "My name is Alice. I noticed that you always eat alone and wondered why."

Maria didn't answer and the tears rolled down her cheeks. "Why are you crying?" Alice asked. The others students who wondered what was wrong stared at her. "Let's take a walk," Alice said, giving Maria her hand. When they were outside the building she

guided Maria to the Charles River and sat her on the bench facing the river. Maria saw a single person rowing a punt leaving a white wake behind. It made her feel lonely and she started to cry. Alice held her hand and didn't say a word. After Maria stopped crying, she told her what Anthony had done and how Uncle Terry reacted. Alice's face turned red when she said, "If I ever meet Anthony I'll practice my kick-boxing skills, and kill him instead of putting him in the emergency room."

Every evening Alice took Maria to the Charles River and listened to her ordeal with Anthony. When she cried Alice wiped the tears, put her arm around her shoulder, kissed her cheek and said, "I'll protect you. Nobody will hurt you again."

When Maria spoke with Uncle Terry and Aunt Mary about Alice they suggested she should bring her to Sunday brunch. Alice adored Uncle Terry and spoke with him about her conflicts concerning what career she should pursue after graduating. At one of their Sunday brunches Uncle Terry suggested to her, "Get your Master's Degree in Criminology and then join the police force."

Aunt Mary voice had a sharp edge when she told Alice, "Don't listen to him. It's a lousy profession that requires long working hours and phone calls in the middle of the night."

Uncle Terry didn't respond, looked at Alice, smiled and winked his eye. Aunt Mary, who saw it, told her, "You'll be sorry if you listen to him."

* * *

Maria wondered why Alice didn't go out with men and assumed she also had had a bad experience and that was the reason she practiced kick-boxing every day at the gym.

Not wanting to pry into her background, she didn't ask and felt that when Alice was ready she would tell her. It was New Year's Eve when they walked along the Charles River after attending Alice friend party, trying to wear off the alcohol affect. The buildings' lights reflecting in the river created mosaic patterns of gold and black in the calm water. "Look how beautiful the river is," Alice told Maria before she hugged and kissed her lips. Surprised, Maria assumed it was the alcohol that influenced Alice's behavior but it felt good and kissed her back. Encouraged, Alice gave her a passionate kiss and then said, "My roommate went home for the holiday. Stay at my apartment tonight."

Maria hesitated for a second, knowing where it would lead, but agreed remembering her experience with Anthony and not wanting to get involved with another man again. They walked to Alice apartment holding hands. Alice opened the door, led Maria to the living room and turned on the stereo to Boston's classical radio station, WCRB. They sat on the couch talking until midnight when the wall clock chimed and the stereo played 'Auld Lang Syne.' Alice smiled, took Maria's hand and led her to the middle of the living room. Maria closed her eyes when they danced, feeling Alice's firm body pressed against hers. At that moment, she remembered the painful relationship with Anthony and the tears rolled down her cheeks. Alice stopped dancing, gently wiped off the tears that rolled down Maria's cheeks, kissed her lips and she led her into the bedroom. Maria felt Alice smooth lips on her face. *'This is love without pain,'* she told herself, kissing Alice back. After they made love, Maria fell asleep hugging Alice. In the morning, Alice's kisses woke her up. They made love again and slept until mid-afternoon.

“Are you sorry it happened?” Alice asked Maria when she saw her lying on her back staring at the ceiling. “I don’t think so. It’s a new experience for me. After what I experienced with Anthony I didn’t want to sleep with another man.”

They showered together, got dressed and went to visit Uncle Terry and Aunt Mary who took them to their customary Sunday brunch. When they saw Maria and Alice holding hands they exchanged looks and Uncle Terry told Maria, “I’ll speak with your parents about Alice.”

The following weekend they visited Maria's parents and on Sunday night Uncle Terry called Maria's parents and said, "We’re back. Come over to our house tonight with Alice and we go out to dinner.”

The minute they walked into the house, Maria asked Uncle Terry "What did my parents say?"

“Your mother accepted the fact that Alice is your lover but your father had a difficult time believing it. I told him that if he didn’t accept Alice as part of the family, he would lose you as a daughter. They would like to see you and Alice next weekend.”

“Are they going to give me a hard time?”

“No. They’re looking forward to meeting Alice.”

Despite Uncle Terry’s reassurance, Maria was concerned about how her father would react. When they entered her parents' home she was relieved when he and her mother hugged and kissed Alice on both cheeks.

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After Maria graduated from Boston College she applied to Columbia Law School, following Uncle Terry advice. She graduated at her top of her class and received lucrative offers from various law firms. Unable to make up her mind, she spoke with Uncle Terry about it. "Join the Manhattan District Attorney's office where you will be able to prosecute criminals," he told her. His words brought back painful memories. She therefore decided to follow his advice, hoping she would get the chance to prosecute Anthony, assuming he was still involved in criminal activities. Alice got her Master's degree from Columbia's School of Social Work and chose to become a probation officer. Maria was surprised and asked her, "Why did you join the police department?"

Alice laughed and kissed her before she said, "Uncle Terry is the reason why we joined the justice system."

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Maria sat at her desk at the end of the day reading her next morning trial brief when the phone rang. She picked it up and heard Alice excited voice, "We found the gunman! He's one of my parolees. The fool didn't wear gloves. The thumb print that was found on the counter matched what we have in the database. His name is Anthony Ferrara."

Maria's chest muscles tightened and she felt her heart pounding, wondering if it was the same Anthony Ferrara. Few minutes later, Alice entered her office holding the file and put it in front of Maria. She had a startled reaction when she looked at him. He'd changed since the last time she saw him. His hair was gray and face scarred. Maria read his bio and learned that he served two jail terms for armed robbery. After the first he was convicted to 10 year's term and after the second robbery for twelve years. In

addition, she found out that he was a drug addict, was released from prison the year before and Alice was his parole officer. Unable to close the file, she stared at his picture. "What the matter," Alice asked, alarmed by Maria's behavior. "Guess who he is?"

Alice facial expression hardened when she said "Shit, I've been seeing him every month for the past year not realizing who he is."

Maria abruptly got off her chair and said, "I need to get fresh air,"

Alice took her hand and led her out of the office. Maria, preoccupied, didn't say a word when they walked to the Olive Garden restaurant where they often ate. The owner, happy to see them, realized something was wrong when they walked in and instructed the waiter to leave them alone until they called him. "I can't believe that he would resurface in my life after all these years," Maria told Alice. "I'll order wine. It'll help lower your stress,"

Next, she waved to the waiter. He approached them and gave them the menu. Alice didn't bother open it and told him, "We will have the Chianti Classico Riserva we always have."

Maria's hand shook when she picked up her wine glass, dropped it and it spilled it on the white tablecloth. The owner, who saw it, rushed over and moved them to the next table. Alice had a concerned look when she asked, "Are you going to handle the case?"

"No. If Anthony recognizes me his lawyer will declare a mistrial and he'll walk away free."

"Who are you going to assign the case to?"

"Linda. She's the best prosecutor I have."

“Are you going to ask for the death penalty?”

“No. I’ll instruct her to offer the defense lawyer a plea bargain of life without parole.”

“Why would you do that? He’s a cold-blooded murderer.”

“It’s best not to bring the past back.”

“I wish I had known who he was. I would’ve revoked his parole and put him back in jail. He still had two more years to serve on his previous armed robbery.”

“You had no way of knowing. I never mentioned his last name to you.”

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Linda, unhappy with Maria's decision, told her, “You’re making a big mistake not asking for the death penalty.”

“We have a huge backlog and can’t afford the case to get tied up in court procedures for years.”

Linda didn’t respond, gave Maria a strained look, and walked away holding the file against her chest. The trial lasted less than one day. The jury came back with the verdict in two hours. Based on the plea bargain Linda struck with Anthony's court appointed defense attorney, he was sentenced to life in prison without parole. Maria sat with Alice in the last row, reliving the past. Anthony, who was led out in handcuffs, abruptly stopped walking when he recognized Maria, had a nasty grin and said, “You should have listened to me and had the abortion.”

Maria's anger consumed her and felt a pain where he hit her. When they left the court house she told Alice, "I should have had the son of a bitch sitting on death row for years sweating while his appeals are being processed."

Alice voice was low and husky when she said, "I'll take care of him."

Anthony was placed in Sing-Sing, a maximum-security jail for hardcore criminals. Two weeks later Alice walked into Maria's office on a sunny warm afternoon, put her hand on her shoulder and said in a clam voice, "Anthony is dead."

Maria had difficulty believing it, stared at her and asked "How did he die?"

"He was stabbed by a fellow inmate while on kitchen duty."

"Why?"

"It has to do with a drug deal they had. Anthony didn't pay the agreed 50% share."

"Did you ask the guards to put them together, knowing their history?"

"Does it matter? The chapter is closed."

Maria looked at Uncle Terry's smiling face in the picture on her desk, read his inscription and told herself, *Alice was your beloved student and did what you would have done.*