

# FATHERS AND SONS

by Sharon Dickerson

(a *BATB/ Dark Justice* crossover)

*Judge Nicholas Marshall*

The ballroom overflowed with couples mingling, making connections, congratulating each other on jobs well done, and trading quips over drinks.

He felt totally out of place. Judge Nicholas Marshall smiled at his assistant, as they meandered slowly away from his well-wishers for a moment of privacy before the spotlight of public recognition found him once more. He never knew that being a public person could be so awkward.

Answering the inevitable questions was bad enough. Most reporters concentrated on his public records; a few reporters investigated his immediate past. A series of articles revealed his rise to success, from the lowly cop who worked his way through law school, to his election as District Attorney, then his appointment to the Federal bench. Still fewer pressed him for juicy details of his private life and, when none were forthcoming, invented imaginary dalliances for him. Kelly found them amusing, but he thought it smacked of impertinence.

The expression made him smile. *'Impertinence?'* Only Father could have used that phrase and not be joking. Perhaps he should see the old man as long as he was in New York, especially now that he'd made some measure of success.

"Congratulations, De .... Don't know how you did it, but I'm glad it went to you." A hand slapped him on the shoulder; he whirled around, ready for anything.

"Harry!" he grinned. Harry Stone was the last person he'd expected to see at such a posh gathering, but on second thought it wasn't surprising. After all, they were colleagues now. "What are you doing here?"

"Cadging (*ask for or obtain something to which one is not strictly entitled*) some free food. For once, it's decent." Harry grinned at his friend. "Lemme tell you, ever since Christine got back into town, I've eaten more rubber chicken..." He stuck his tongue out, pretending to choke.

"I would've thought you'd grab a few to put in your act." He laughed at the offended glare.

"I'll have you know, I'm a class act now. How 'bout yourself? You let anyone know that you were selected *'Man of the Year'* by the State Bar Association? Father'd be thrilled, and Vin..."

Devin snorted derisively. "Father thrilled? About what I'm doing now? Are we talking about the same man, Harry?" Then seeing a woman bearing down on them, Devin gave the high sign and Harry fell silent. "No, I'm down here with my assistant, Kelly Cochran. And you?"

"Representative Christine Sullivan." Harry indicated the blonde Devin had spotted, she beamed at them. "She worked for me once upon a time. Christine, I'd like you to meet Judge Nicholas Marshall. He's an old friend of mine."

"Really? I never knew you knew any respect ..." She caught herself and blushed slightly. "I'm very pleased to meet any friend of Harry's." She held out her hand with the brave air of a martyr prepared for the worst.

Smiling, he shook it, for a moment, he almost expected her to stare at her hand in wonder. "Harry's the magician. I just stick to my books."

"Yeah, he can be a real stick-in-the-mud at times. You do anything in your spare time besides study law?"

"You might be surprised." Poker-faced, Devin met Harry's questioning gaze.

A tall, slender blonde slipped her arm through him. "The judge interests himself in lots of way to benefit the public."

"Sounds like she's been reading your PR releases," Harry quipped; she frowned, slightly and he stepped back. "Best protect me from your watchdog. Maybe she likes magic tricks?"

"Not now, Harry...." Christine smiled at the newcomer who shifted her gaze to meet hers. "I'm Christine Sullivan. You're ..."

"Kelly Cochran. I work with Judge Marshall." She scrutinized Harry who grinned and glanced toward his friend. "I know of you, Ms. Sullivan, but I've never heard of you before, Mr ..."

"Judge Stone. Ask around, my reputation precedes me." He gestured wildly.

"I bet it does. Nick, there's a reporter who wants to talk to you."

Devin grimaced. "Not again. I thought you instructed them to wait----"

"This one's most insistent. I barely stopped her before she came looking for you. Go on, Nick."

"It's the price of fame; your public awaits." This earned him an icy glare, but Harry ignored it. "I'll keep the lovely lady company; she'll be safe as houses."

"But who'll protect you?" Devin retorted, leaving both sputtering in his wake.

They watched the reporter peel off from her post near the bar and head toward her target. "Poor Nick," Harry muttered. "Wonder what sort of story he'll feed 'em this time?"

"Story?" If she had been a dog, Kelly's ears would have perked. "Are you implying that Judge Marshall hasn't been telling the truth?"

"Well, let's just say he hasn't told them all the truth." He hesitated; the woman's expression was too intense for such a trivial statement. "A man's got to have a few secrets."

Christine tugged his arm. "Little pitchers have big ears," she said mysteriously and bobbed her head towards the nearest group of people.

They might not be eavesdropping, but he owed it to Devin not to spill the beans. Harry let Christine guide him towards a more secluded spot; the mirrored wall kept them in plain sight, but no one else was nearby. As he expected, Kelly tagged along.

"You've known the judge long?" she asked, almost too casually.

"Sure, we go a long way back. I know him and his whole family."

Her expression told him he'd said too much already. "You do? Tell me about them...."

Hesitating, he wondered how much he could tell. "Well, Nick's kinda private about his folks; they had a major falling out long ago...." That much was true; he hoped she'd leave it at that. Let Dev clean up his own past. "He hasn't seen them in a long time."

"You know, I didn't know Judge Marshall had any family left." She paused, watching his expression. "You do know that his wife and child were killed a few years ago."

"How awful!" Christine glanced from Harry to Kelly, as if she hoped they were merely testing each other. "He must have been devastated."

"It took him a long time to find some meaning for his life again." Kelly's eyes narrowed. "He could've

used the support of an old friend."

Harry flinched slightly at the sarcastic tone, but managed to keep his tone neutral. She wouldn't goad him into admitting anything about Dev's earlier life. "We'd lost touch with one another; for a long time, Nick moved around a lot. I didn't know he'd gotten married until I read their obits in the papers."

Kelly's lips quirked as if she'd like to take a few more stabs in the dark, but Devin's reappearance earned him a reprieve. Slipping her arm through Devin's, she smiled at him. "I've been talking to Harry about old times; I never knew you had any family in New York City."

Devin glanced at Harry who shrugged. "Exactly what has he been telling you?"

"Oh, this and that...."

"And you'd better take it all with a grain of salt," Christine advised, as they moved towards the banquet tables. "Harry can invent the most outrageous stories! Why little Charlie was just telling me the other night about this lion man that lives in Harry's basement."

A crooked grin spread over Devin's face as Harry rolled his eyes heavenward. "How intriguing, Miss. Sullivan. I'd love to hear about it sometime."

Fortunately, for Harry's peace of mind, the master of ceremonies summoned them to their places; as Judge Marshall took the place of honor, the banquet officially began.

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"Why haven't you ever told me about your family? Kelly asked, as they made their way back to their rooms. The ceremony had been over long ago, but it had still taken Nick almost two hours to get through all the friends and acquaintances congratulating him.

"Just never came up, I guess," Devin/Nick hedged. They walked slowly, both lost in their own thoughts. Kelly, dying of curiosity about the heretofore unknown family of Judge Nick Marshall, Devin, desperately trying to come up with a way to get her off track. The last thing he needed right now was a trained private investigator snooping into his rather colorful past.

"Why not?" Kelly pressed. "What could possibly be wrong with your family that you don't want to talk about them?" When she got no response, Kelly continued. "Judge Stone seemed to indicate you were hiding something."

***"Harry's got a vivid imagination,"*** Devin responded curtly. He stopped in front of the door to Kelly's room and held out his hand for her key. She handed it to him and he opened the door, flipping on the light before giving the key back to her. Kelly stepped just inside the room, pausing when she was only inches from Nick. He pressed back against the doorway when she leaned toward him and she stopped, a puzzled look on her face.

"It's been a long day and an even longer night, Kelly," Devin told her, exhaustion in every syllable.

"That's never stopped you before." Her smile invited him to explore the possibilities.

"I'll take a rain check, Kelly. Keep warm, and think of me." He retreated swiftly to his own room before she could respond, resisting the urge to glance over his shoulder to make certain she had not followed him. He quickly unlocked the door, slipped inside, and leaned against the locked door. He was safe.

He allowed himself a few seconds to congratulate himself on his quick exit then moved swiftly to the closet door, stripping off his coat, tie, and shirt as he went. Twenty minutes later, the prim and proper judge of earlier in the evening had disappeared and Devin Wells, former soldier of fortune, world traveler, and jack-of-all-occupations, had taken his place.

Devin looked out cautiously before stepping into the hallway. As far as he could tell, the corridor was empty. He headed straight for the stairs, going through the fire door with as little noise as was possible. He walked down the stairs quickly and quietly, never pausing to make sure he wasn't being followed.

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As soon as Kelly heard the door to the judge's room open, she cracked open her own and watched with a mixture of surprise and anger as he hurried down the hall toward the stairs. *'So much for being exhausted. If he'd wanted to go out alone, all he'd had to do was say so. She would have understood; there wasn't any need for all this intrigue.'* Still curious in spite of herself, she grabbed her coat and went after him. The stairwell door proved to be her first challenge. *'How was she going to get the door open without revealing her presence?'* She managed to get the door open with a minimum of noise, but she almost waited a few seconds to make sure she hadn't been detected then continued after her quarry. She could barely make out the sound of his rubber-soled footsteps as she made her descent. She only hoped he wouldn't get out of the building and too far ahead of her before she could catch sight of him again.

Devin pushed open the outside door and took a deep breath of the Manhattan night air. There was nothing anywhere like the combination of the musty smell of rain and car exhaust to make one feel at home. Allowing himself a small smile, he shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket, walked down the alley, and onto the street.

Kelly ran down the remainder of the stairs as soon as she heard the outside door open. Now it didn't matter if she made any noise; she just had to be sure she didn't lose the judge. She hit the heavy fire door and burst into the alley, eyes scanning every direction for her prey. A few anxious moments later, she spotted him almost a block ahead of her, heading toward Central Park. Trying not to be too obvious, she hurried to keep him in sight. He moved at a fast but unhurried pace, apparently going to some specific place but not concerned about when he would get there.

*'Where was he going at this time of night and why was he so reluctant to tell her about it?'* She watched as he turned into the park then she ran to keep up with him. If she lost him in there, she might as well go back to the hotel, because she knew she'd never catch up with him. Somehow, she managed to keep him in sight, her questions growing as she followed him deeper into Central Park. Realizing the only way she was going to get any answers was to continue following him, she walked behind him and hoped he led her to some eventually.

The memories surrounded Devin as he walked along the familiar paths, so thick at times he felt as though he was being smothered. Every tree, every rock along the way seemed to hold some special memory. The old, now abandoned carousel caught his eye and he stopped, consumed for a few minutes with the memory of a group of ragged children enjoying their illicit midnight ride. Taking a deep breath, he shook himself out of his reverie and continued on his way.

His feet followed the path almost without conscious thought. Almost before he knew it, he was standing on the rise leading down to the entrance of one of the old drainage tunnels. For a brief moment, he considered leaving and going back to the hotel.

*'No,'* he told himself firmly, *'that was not an option. Harry knew he was in New York, and if Harry knew, then Vincent knew or would soon know, and Devin knew he couldn't disappoint his younger brother.'* While he wasn't really looking forward to facing Father, he did have to admit he was anxious to see his nephew and his new niece. Sighing, he told himself *'it wasn't going to get any easier, and the sooner he went down there and got it over with, the better.'*

Devin walked down the slope and into the tunnel entrance, going immediately to the grating covering

the far end. Pulling the grate open, he pressed the hidden switch and the door opened with a groan of metal against stone. He peered into the softly lit inner tunnel and was faintly disappointed. No welcoming committee this time. Oh well, at least he wasn't being chased by anyone else. Taking a deep breath, he stepped inside, his hand absently brushing the inner switch to shut the door as he headed down the corridor towards the main living areas.

All in all, Kelly had had very little trouble following the judge. He'd stayed on the main paths and had never looked behind him. That, in itself, made her very suspicious. The Judge Nicholas Marshall she knew would never be so complacent. He would be on constant watch for anything unusual, especially in a strange city. Then again, this wasn't exactly a strange city to him. Hadn't Judge Stone hinted that New York was Nick's hometown? Maybe she'd be able to meet some of his mysterious family before they had to leave. She certainly hoped she could, but that still didn't explain what he was doing in Central Park in the middle of the night.

Kelly's curiosity was growing by leaps and bounds the deeper they went into the park. She had exhausted every reasonable explanation for his picking that destination she could possibly come up with.

*'What was so important he would venture into such a dangerous district so late at night?'* Kelly continued to follow the judge at a discreet distance, becoming even more puzzled when he moved off the main path and headed down a slope toward one of the drainage tunnels. She just managed to duck behind a convenient tree when he stopped momentarily outside the entrance then peeked around barely in time to see him go inside. Taking that as her cue, she ran from her concealment to the tunnel opening and tried to look inside. She cursed under her breath when she noticed there was no place to hide where she could see what the judge was doing.

After a few minutes, when he did not reappear, she decided to risk a quick glance inside. Just as she started to make her move, she heard a grinding noise coming from the tunnel interior, causing her to freeze in her tracks. She waited a few more minutes then decided to ignore the risks of being seen and she slowly peered around the corner inside the entrance. The tunnel was empty. Stunned, Kelly ran inside. The tunnel ended a few yards inside the entrance; a metal grating barring further access to the tunnel. Her detective instincts now fully aroused, she began studying the small room.

The evening had been damp after the rains earlier in the day. She could see a man's muddy footprints on the concrete leading from the grassy verge into the tunnel proper. The single set of footprints ended, however, just before the grating. She knelt to study the prints more closely; no, a heelprint rested under the grating itself. Somehow, Nick had gotten inside. Several minutes later, her search had turned up no further clues. As far as she could tell, Judge Nick Marshall had vanished into the depths of the earth.

She sighed heavily and found a dry spot to sit down. Well, he'd have to surface sometime; and when he did, she'd be there to greet him.

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As Devin made his way slowly from the surface, he let the well-remembered sounds of home wash over him. The clanging of the messages being sent along Pascal's beloved pipes, the faint sounds of the subways and trains hurtling along the tracks Above, the occasional murmur of surface voices drifting through the bedrock to the people Below. Even though he'd been away so long, he was still amazed how comforting these simple sounds were - and how much he'd missed hearing them.

Voices were definitely becoming the dominant sound the deeper he moved into the tunnels. It was also becoming apparent he'd been spotted by some of the look-outs, if the messages going along the pipes were any indication. Devin knew it would only be a matter of time before Vincent, or William. or

Pascal, or someone else, showed up to investigate. In a way, he would have liked to have made a surprise entrance but the only way that would have happened would have been for him to beam directly into the middle of Father's study. Besides, if he was right, they already knew he was in New York thanks to Harry. Probably just as well; Father never dealt very well with surprises anyway.

Lost in thought, Devin continued down the corridor, his mind already going over what he was going to say to his father and brother when he finally saw them. Suddenly, he became aware of a large object directly in front of him and he looked up into the amused face of his brother.

Devin stopped abruptly, too startled to say anything. "Am I to gather you are *'not'* running from the police this time?" he inquired.

Devin grinned. "You've got that right, little brother. This time *'I'm'* the one who chases the bad guys!" Both men laughed, then Devin reached out and enfolded his sibling in a huge bear-hug. "It's been a long time, Vincent, too long."

Vincent returned the hug then released the older man. Devin home again. It was almost too hard to believe. When he'd heard the messages about the intruder in the upper levels, he'd hoped it would be his brother. Silently, he thanked Harry for alerting him that Devin was back in town, but he'd also been afraid the rift that existed between Devin and his father would be enough to keep his older brother away. He was glad to see it had not. "It's so good to see you, Devin. I can hardly believe it's been almost six years since your last visit."

"A lot of things have happened during those six years - to both of us."

Vincent agreed silently then both began walking slowly down the candlelit corridor. "It's also been a long time since your last letter. Harry told me he saw you last night at a banquet where you received an award."

Devin shrugged. "We were at a judge's convention; they have one every year. They usually give out some sort of award to a judge or two at this sort of thing. This year they gave one to me. It's really no big deal."

Vincent watched his brother closely. From what Harry had told him, the award was only given to those judges who had distinguished themselves on the bench and in the community during the year. It was a huge honor - one they didn't bestow every year - and very prestigious.

"Still, you must have been pleased to receive the award."

"Let's just say it was an excuse to get out of town and to come to New York for a weekend." They walked along in silence for a few minutes; however, before the situation could become unbearable, Devin continued. "I seem to recall from the last letter I received from you that I now have a niece to go along with my nephew. How is she doing? And Catherine and Jacob?"

*'Ah,'* Vincent thought. *'Back to safer topics.'*

"Catherine is doing very well; the children keep her - and me and Father, I have to admit - very busy these days. Jacob has finally learned to accept that his sister is here to stay, and I think he's actually beginning to like her. As for Sarah, she seems to adore her big brother, and she watches him constantly. I hope she continues to like him as she grows older."

Devin nodded, pleased to hear the obvious affection and contentment in Vincent's voice. He remembered how he and Caroline felt at each one of Sandy's accomplishments and how much they were looking forward to giving her a brother or sister one day. All of those dreams died, however, when Caroline and Sandy died, instead of him, when the car bomb exploded. It was an old wound that would never really heal, but at least he could be happy that things had turned out so well for his brother. Of all the people he knew and had met in his life, Vincent was the most deserving of happiness.

"I hope I get to see both of the kids and Catherine while I'm here."

"Of course," Vincent replied. "Why would you not?"

"Well, let's just see how everything goes with Father."

"Everything will be fine with Father. He will be very pleased to see you."

"I wish I had your optimism." He ignored Vincent's sharp look, but his brother never had a chance to reply as at that moment they reached the entrance to their father's chambers.

Devin stopped just outside the doorway and took a deep breath. *'Here it was; this was what he'd been dreading the most and now that he was here, he wasn't sure he was up to it. Should he leave now? Run away like a scared five-year-old?'* He'd only run once in his entire life, and then he'd kept running for the next twenty years. Even after he came home, he'd only stayed for a short time then he was off running again. Running until he stopped and took a job with the DA's office and met Caroline.

Devin shook himself mentally and glanced over at Vincent who was watching him very carefully.

He shrugged. "It's now or never." He gestured to the entrance. "After you."

Vincent sighed and led the way into their father's chambers.

Dr. Jacob Wells was working on the ledgers for the tunnel community when he heard the movements and glanced up to see Vincent coming through the doorway. "Ah, Vincent, there you are. I've been looking over our accounts, and I believe I've discovered a very interesting trend. If you have a few minutes, I'd like to discuss...." He stopped, the words dying in his throat as he saw the man who came in with Vincent.

The older man's face registered his astonishment; slowly he took his glasses off as he stood up, the moments ticking by in an agonizing pace until he finally held out his arms and Devin moved past his brother and into his father's embrace. Father hugged his older son as tightly as he could. He'd known that Vincent had been corresponding with Devin for some time, but he never thought he'd see him anytime soon. Finally, he released him and held Devin at arm's length, looking intently into his face. He noted his oldest son's longer hair and the new lines around his eyes and mouth. Those spoke of events Father hoped Devin would feel free to talk about later.

And something else was different about Devin that he was having trouble putting his finger on. It was right in front of him, if he could only see.... the scars! The three distinctive scars on Devin's left cheek were gone! It wasn't just a covering of makeup, the scars had been surgically removed. It would have to be one of the first questions he asked his son. In the meantime, Devin was home, he was really at home.

"My God, it's so good to see you. You're looking very well. How have you been? What are you doing in New York?"

Devin shot a look at Vincent. Obviously, Harry had not shared his news with Father as well. *'So, where should he begin?'* He guessed he should start with the safest subject first.

"I've been doing fine, Father, and it's good to see you too. How have you been doing? Vincent tells me things have been going well here Below. And he's been catching me up on the activities of some of the community's newest residents." At Father's blank look, Devin filled in the blanks. "Jacob and Sarah."

Father beamed at the mention of his grandchildren and Vincent noticed how easily Devin had steered the conversation away from himself.

"Jacob and Sarah are two of the most beautiful and intelligent children in the community. Of course, I'm not prejudiced at all where they're concerned, but I do think they are...."

Devin smiled as he listened to his father burble on about Vincent's children.

He wondered *'what Father would have thought about Sandy, if he possibly would have liked her as much as Vincent's kids'*, then he quickly quashed the idea. *'No use thinking about things that were*

*never going to happen. Thoughts like those were dangerous.* It made him start remembering too much, made him yearn for things that could never be again, and he couldn't afford the depression. He brought himself back to the conversation with an effort and tried to concentrate on what Father was saying.

".... and just the other day, I was talking to Jacob and for just a moment, I had to stop and tell myself this was only a four-year-old child. It was like talking to an adult. He's really very, very bright."

"Father," Vincent finally managed to break in. "You really shouldn't go on about the children like this. I'm sure some of the other parents Below think you're showing too much favoritism toward Jacob and Sarah."

"I don't show them any more attention than any of the other tunnel children," Father protested. "Besides, I'm their grandfather. Aren't I allowed to give them a few special privileges?"

Devin grinned at what was obviously an old argument, one that Vincent was apparently losing. "Give it up, little brother," he advised. "I think this is one fight you're *'never'* going to win."

"I have a feeling you're right," Vincent agreed, smiling. "Still, I must remind him from time to time or he would be even worse about the children."

"So, what does Catherine think about all of this grandfatherly attention?" Devin questioned. "I'm sure she's just as concerned about all this overt display of favoritism as you are."

Vincent sighed and shook his head, enjoying putting his father on the spot for a change. It was good to have Devin back, even if it was just for a short time.

"You're right, it's a trial; but she manages to endure it."

Finally, Father could stand no more of the teasing. "Boys," he said in his best parental tone. "I do *'not'* give those children any more privileges than any other child in the tunnels."

Devin and Vincent looked at each other and started laughing.

"We know you don't, Father," Devin told him. "It's just the way you kept going on and on, it sounded like that. We were just giving you a hard time."

Father tried to give them both one of his parental stern looks but failed miserably. For a few minutes, it was just like the past twenty-six years had never happened, he had his two boys back with him again, and all was right with the world.

***"Hey, who started the party without me?"*** A voice boomed from the chamber entrance. All three men looked up in time to see Harry Stone bounded down the stairs toward them.

"Now you know you can't have a decent celebration without me around. Besides, I couldn't miss Devin's homecoming." He came over to his childhood friend and clapped him on the back. "Sorry I almost blew it for you tonight," he said, ignoring Devin's subtle efforts to shut him up. "I hope Kelly didn't give you too hard a time about your family and all."

"You've already seen Devin, Harold?" Father asked. He looked over at his dark-haired son and frowned. "You weren't in any trouble, were you?"

"Nah, nothing like that, Father," Harry reassured him. "We just happened to run into each other at the banquet at the Plaza."

Devin gave up trying to get his friend's attention to silence him. Harry was like a steamroller - once he got started, it was almost impossible to stop him. He was trying to think of an explanation that Father would believe when he became aware of the man's eyes on him. "You were both at a banquet at the Plaza Hotel tonight? What sort of banquet?"

"Oh, just the usual type, lots of people, lots of food," Devin said, desperately trying to come up with



another subject quickly so Father wouldn't want to question him any further. Then again, this was his father he was talking about. "So, Harry, what did you ..."

"Don't try to change the subject, Devin," Father interrupted. "What were the two of you doing at the same banquet tonight?"

Harry looked at both Devin and Vincent, a puzzled expression on his face. "Didn't you tell him?"

"Tell me what?" Father intoned in his most serious voice. "What are you trying to keep from me, Devin? You know, you never did answer my question about what you are doing in New York?"

Devin groaned inwardly. He knew this had been a bad idea. *'Why couldn't he just have visited Vincent and Catherine and their kids and left it at that? Why had he thought seeing Father was going to be any different than it had ever been? It always turned out the same way. He'd tell Father what he'd been doing. Father would disapprove, then he'd get mad and leave.'* He sighed. It was never any different. And now, he hesitated before answering, trying to figure out a way to answer the question.

Fortunately, for the moment, Harry volunteered to finish what he'd started. Unfortunately, Harry also told him the truth.

"It's nothing mysterious, Father. It was just a convention for judges, district attorneys, their assistants, and people like that. I guess you could call it Judge Con."

"Well, that explains what *'you'* were doing there, Harold, but what about Devin. Does this mean you've been working in the legal system? Surely, you're not trying to be a lawyer again, are you? I thought you would have learned your lesson the last time."

"No," Devin answered truthfully. "I'm not trying to be a lawyer again, but I *am* working in the legal profession these days."

"Ah, I see. You must be a legal assistant, aren't you? Well, I think that's an excellent career choice, Devin. You can certainly be helpful to a judge or district attorney, considering all the varied professions you've had. I must say I think that's very commendable. I'm glad to see you using your talents constructively."

Devin blinked in surprise. *'Father, paying him a compliment?'* Even if the reason was completely erroneous, a compliment was still a compliment, and he was ready to say thanks and count himself lucky for getting off so easily.

Harry, however, had other ideas. "No, no, Father. You've got it all wrong. Devin's not a legal assistant, he's a superior court judge."

Devin clapped his hand over his eyes and shook his head. Never in his life had he ever felt the urge to murder someone on the spot - until now. He didn't have to see Father's intense and unforgiving gaze turn his way, he felt it. Everything had been going so well up to this point. '

*'Why did Harry have to show up and open his mouth?'* Now he'd have to explain everything, and he knew what the outcome of that was going to be. Finally, he looked at Father, and found the disapproving expression already firmly in place.

"A judge? *'You'* are a *'judge'*?"

"And a very good one," Harry interjected. "The main reason Devin came to this convention was to receive the Adrian Deaneaux Award. It's one of the highest honors given to judges; in essence, it's the *'Man of the Year'* award given by the State Bar Association. I think it's terrific they gave it to Devin this year. Everyone I spoke to last night talked about how much he's done for his community. He really deserved this award!"

But all Father heard was that Devin was a jurist. "How can you become a judge? Since when did people without a law degree or any kind of legal experience become judges? Now I know why the law enforcement has deteriorated so much in the world Above."

Devin's face darkened at his father's pronouncements, his eyes blazing with unspoken fury.

Before Devin could explode, Harry said bluntly. "That was a low blow, Father." The old man glared at him, but he met it squarely. "Devin does a damned fine job. I don't know how he managed to get on the judges' list - hell, probably anyone with connections can get on - how else you think I got there? Sure wasn't cause of my good looks or outstanding legal talent, believe you me ..."

"But surely there are some qualifications ..."

"Yeah, sure, but Devin's got what counts the most - horse sense and a sense of what's right. Two things he must've picked up before he hit the streets, 'cause you sure won't learn about either one there.... I guess he got some decent home-training somewhere down the line, huh?"

The street slang left Father looking puzzled, but Devin had to hide a grin at the backhanded compliment to his parent.

"What did he say?" the old man said plaintively.

"He means you did a good job, Father." Devin waited tensely as he assimilated the translation; so much depended on the old man's acceptance of his new life.

Finally, a slow smile appeared. "I suppose I did at that, but look at the both of you! Judges in my time would have never worn such long hair - where do you think you're living? The tunnels?"

All three of the young men laughed and Devin felt a slight weight lift from his shoulders. Father would never approve of his methods in achieving his various occupations, but at least he seemed to accept this one. "Actually, Father, I don't wear my hair like this on the bench. This is just my off-duty look. It helps me to keep the personalities separate."

"Personalities?" Harry echoed, giving his friend a sideways look. "You got a problem keeping your identity together or something?"

Devin hesitated just a moment too long before answering. "No, nothing like that. I just like to keep the public and the private sides of me apart."

Harry frowned and started to question him further, but Vincent caught his eye and indicated he should let the subject drop. The night court judge wasn't sure what that was all about, but he knew he could convince Vincent to fill him in later. It was clear something else was happening in Devin's life, other than the *'official version'* that Vincent knew, but that they didn't want Father to know. Okay, he could accept that but Vincent had better fill him in asap.

For his part, Father seemed to accept Devin's explanation. Taking his eldest son by the arm, he led him over beyond the desk to two overstuffed chairs. As the two men settled in for a long talk, Harry looked at Vincent and smiled. Despite a rocky start, it looked as though some measure of understanding and respect had finally been achieved. It was a good beginning and the two old friends were grateful for Devin's sake - and for Father's.

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It was nearing dawn as Vincent accompanied Devin back toward the surface entrance at the drainage tunnel. Although there was probably a tunnel entrance beneath the Plaza Hotel, Devin had decided he wanted to walk back through the park and watch the sun come up. He'd had a good discussion with Father and they'd managed to clear up a lot of old conflicts they had between them. Maybe from now on, he wouldn't be so hesitant to come home.

He glanced at his brother as they walked, and he had to suppress a smile as he remembered how chagrined Vincent had been when Father asked about his missing scars - Vincent hadn't noticed they weren't there. Neither had Harry for that matter. After chastising them for their lack of observation,

he'd explained how he'd had the surgery just after being elected to the bench. He didn't bother to tell them he'd done it so he wouldn't be easily recognized when he worked with the Night Watchmen. Somehow, he had a feeling Vincent would come to that conclusion eventually.

He wished he could have stayed long enough to see Vincent's children awake, instead of just asleep in their beds, but he had a full day ahead of him at the convention and Kelly would be looking for him soon enough. God knows, he didn't want to arouse her suspicions any more than they already were.

Still, it was nice to see Cathy again and to tell her about his work. After she had awakened in the wee hours of the morning, wondering why her husband had not yet come to bed, she, Devin, and Harry had had a great time talking shop and trading stories about the unusual and insane people they ran into while in court. They would probably still be talking if Devin hadn't realized the time and known he had to get back. He'd left with promises to return in the near future for a longer visit and the security of knowing that this time he would be welcome.

All too soon, they reached the tunnel entrance. Vincent paused before hitting the door switch, turning to face his brother. "I hope you have a safe trip back. Please do not wait too long to come back to visit."

Devin smiled, a relaxed expression on his face for the first time in many years. So many demons had been laid to rest during this trip. Despite all his earlier apprehensions, he'd actually enjoyed seeing Father again. Only time would tell if their new found understanding would hold up under another visit.

"I'll try to be back as soon as I can," he promised. "I can't always predict my schedule."

"I understand. I know you'll do the best you can," Vincent told him. They looked at each other for a long awkward moment, neither one quite wanting to say goodbye, then Vincent reached out and pulled his older brother into a hug. "Take care of yourself, Devin. It was very good to see you again."

Devin returned the hug, unwilling for a few minutes to lose contact with his only sibling. "I enjoyed seeing you again, too. And Cathy and Father. Tell the kids their Uncle Devin missed seeing them this time but I'm looking forward to the next." He released his grip and took a step back from Vincent.

"You take care of yourself," Devin told him sternly. "I don't want to come back and find out you've let something happen to yourself, so you'd better make sure nothing happens to you, or anyone else either. You understand me'?"

Vincent laughed. "I'll promise if you do."

"Agreed." Taking a deep breath, Devin reached behind Vincent's shoulder and hit the switch. The tunnel entrance slowly opened, revealing the iron grating. Together the two men pulled that open as well and Devin stepped through the opening. He glanced back down the softly lit corridor leading to the living quarters, suddenly reluctant to leave. That was certainly a new emotion for him, and he wasn't quite sure what to make of it.

"I guess this is it, little brother. Tell everyone I said so long."

Vincent nodded then stared at something over Devin's right shoulder. He pointed in response to his brother's questioning look and Devin turned around to find Kelly, leaning against the entrance to the drainage tunnel, sound asleep.

Devin sighed wearily. He should have anticipated this. "My assistant," Devin whispered, hoping she wouldn't wake up at just this particular moment.

He grinned. "Do you think Father would let me keep her if I tell him she just followed me home?"

Vincent's eyes widened as he tried to choke back a guffaw and he almost strangled on his own laughter. Kelly chose that moment to stir which, in turn, spurred both men into hasty farewell. Devin retreated as close to the tunnel entrance as he could while Vincent brought down the grating and closed the steel doors.

The grating and grinding noise that resounded throughout the drainage tunnel finally succeeded in waking Kelly up. She looked around, momentarily forgetting where she was, then she remembered.

She had been following Nick when he'd gone into this tunnel and disappeared. For his part, Devin had managed to get out of the tunnel before Kelly had fully awakened and stood just outside the entrance, watching her movements. He pulled back as she started to glance his way, cursing himself for being so complacent on his way from the hotel that he never noticed her following him. Oh well, no use getting mad about something he couldn't do anything about now.

Kelly stood up slowly, trying to get some feeling back into her stiff legs and went over to the iron grate, intending to investigate it further now that it was starting to get light outside. Somehow Nick had vanished into this tunnel, and the only place he could have gone was through that grating. That must have been the noise she heard earlier that evening.

*'But what could account for the noise she just heard Did it open again?'*

She was still alone in the tunnel. Someone or something must have either come out or gone in, and this time she was determined to find out who and why.

"Kelly," a voice outside the tunnel called. "Kelly, where are you? Are you in there?" Kelly was still as the voice came closer. She held her breath as someone came into the tunnel and appeared around the corner. She smiled as she recognized the person coming fully into the entrance.

"Kelly," Devin/Nick said, his voice tinged with a mixture of relief and annoyance. "What are you doing in here? I've been looking for you for hours."

"*'You've been 'looking' for 'me'?*" She shook her head, closing her mouth which had fallen open in amazement at his entrance, irritation rapidly replacing the surprise. "I *'saw'* you leave your hotel room last night after you said you were *'so'* exhausted that you had to go to bed - alone - and then I followed you here and you disappeared."

"What do you mean I disappeared? I just went for a walk in the park because after I left you, I found I was too tired to go to sleep then I went back to the hotel. And when I woke about 4:00am and couldn't get back to sleep. I felt so bad about how I left you last night that I came over to your room to... apologize and you weren't there. So, I came looking for you."

Kelly gritted her teeth, and walked stiffly over to where Nick was standing. She stopped in front of him, and shook her finger in his face.

*"That is the biggest bunch of bull I've ever heard. You never went back to the hotel last night and you know it. I don't know what you're hiding, Nick Marshall, but I am going to find out even if it kills me."*

*"If you don't get that finger out of my face, it just might,"* Devin/Nick warned.

Kelly muttered something under her breath, and stalked past him out of the drainage tunnel, and toward the path leading out of the park. Devin grinned once she was out of his sight, then walked out of the tunnels after her. Considering everything, he had to admit, this trip to New York hadn't been too bad. After all was said and done, he had his family back again.

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