

DELETED SCENE

THE REDEMPTION SERIES



CASSIE BEEBE

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DETECTIVE MIKE BENTLEY straightened his stiff, black tie as he entered the courthouse.

He always felt constricted by the long, crisply ironed sleeves of his police uniform. On the job, he was permitted to wear whatever he wanted, within reason, but the courtroom required more formality than he was used to.

As he made his way to the office number Counselor Sanders had provided him, he gave himself several opportunities to change his mind.

He was shocked when he got the call that morning. He couldn't imagine what Jacob Perry or his lawyer could possibly have to discuss with him, and he wasn't sure he had any interest in finding out. But in the end, curiosity won out over his hesitance and he agreed to meet with the men before Jacob's trial.

Now, as he stepped up to the door of Sanders' office, he gave himself one last chance to back out. To say screw this, screw Perry and his lawyer and whatever pathetic

attempt the man had at winning him over to their side. He was certain that was why they called him here. There was no other explanation. He was the arresting officer on the case, and he was set to testify against Perry in a matter of hours. Whatever last ditch effort they were planning to throw his way, would it even be worth his time to listen to? Nothing Perry could say was going to effect Mike's testimony.

But if that was true, he questioned, then what would be the harm? If nothing else, it could make for an interesting story to share with the guys at the precinct.

With that, he knocked firmly on the solid mahogany door.

Counselor Sanders opened the door, stepping aside to usher him in.

They exchanged a nod as Mike entered. His gaze landed on Jacob Perry, rising from his seat at the conference table.

Their eyes met, and the obvious tension pouring off the man was palpable.

Mike straightened, standing tall, and Jacob looked down at his hands.

"Thank you for meeting with us, Detective," Sanders said, taking his seat beside Jacob. "Please, have a seat."

Mike sat across from the men, glancing at Jacob as they both sat. He was still uncomfortably avoiding Mike's gaze.

Sanders cleared his throat. "Well, I'm sure you're wondering why we've asked you here today," he started. "And quite frankly, so am I."

Sanders looked at his client.

"Jacob, would you like to *finally* explain why you've

insisted on this meeting, mere minutes before the trial?" the lawyer asked, irritation coloring his tone.

Jacob blushed, fidgeting with his fingers on the desk before finally looking up. He appraised both of the men before taking in a breath.

"I've been thinking," he started.

Here we go, Mike thought, fighting an eye-roll. He prepared himself for the slew of excuses, justifications, and begging. He sighed at himself for even agreeing to the meeting at all. He wasn't sure why he had expected anything more. This was always the way it went. Nobody went down without a fight, and Perry would be no exception.

Jacob peeked up at him, at least having the decency to look halfway embarrassed about the groveling that was about to commence.

"You're testifying against me?" he asked.

Mike hesitated. He wasn't permitted to share any information about the prosecution's case against him, but he didn't see the point in denying this.

"Yes."

Jacob nodded. "And you'll be...", he trailed off, meeting Mike's eyes again with severity, "sharing the details surrounding my arrest?"

Mike sighed. He knew what he was getting at.

He was able to track Jacob down by following Sarah home, running with the hunch that she knew more about Jacob's whereabouts than she was letting on. If the prosecution asked – and they would ask, Mike knew that from the mock trials – he would have to tell the court how he knew where to find Jacob. He would have to tell the jury, under oath, that the criminal psychologist hired for the Perry case was harboring a fugitive.

It was a fact he didn't take pleasure in. If there was any other way, he would happily keep that little piece of information to himself. But protecting Sarah from the consequences of her own mistakes was far from being worth risking a mistrial.

Mike didn't respond, but his silence was answer enough. Jacob nodded again, processing this.

Counselor Sanders looked between the two men, playing catch up to their silent exchange.

Mike waited for Jacob's protest. He waited for him to beg

for Mike's silence, perhaps throwing in a bribe for good measure. But Jacob just stared at the tabletop between them, eyes far away as he considered this.

The silence dragged for several minutes. Mike and Sanders exchanged a look of concern.

"Jacob?" Sanders prodded.

Jacob sat back in his chair, running both hands through his hair and across his face.

He shook his head. "I can't do this," he muttered.

The other men exchanged another glance. Mike sat up straighter in his chair.

"Do what?" Sanders asked.

Jacob huffed out a sigh. Turning to his lawyer, he asked, "Sarah's testifying for me?"

"Uh," the man muttered, glancing at Mike.

Of course they all knew Sarah was taking the stand. Mike wouldn't have phrased it the way Jacob did, but her testimony was sure to be good for the defense Sanders was building. It would highlight Jacob's mental instability, adding to the notion that he couldn't possibly be held responsible for his actions. But despite all of

them knowing this, Sanders was hesitant to give away any information to the opposition.

Impatient with the lack of response, Jacob turned to Mike. "Who else are you calling to the stand?"

Mike let out a surprised scoff at the bold question. "I can't tell you that."

"That cop's wife?" he persisted, tapping his thumb against the table. He pursed his lips, and Mike could have sworn he saw water glistening in his eyes.

"Jacob, what is this about?" Sanders questioned.

Jacob looked at his lawyer, shaking his head as the water brimmed in his eyes.

"Jacob," the lawyer spoke through a firmly clenched jaw, his voice laden with poorly concealed panic.

Mike watched the exchange, a glimmer of anticipation bubbling in his chest.

Jacob dropped his head to his hands, resting his elbows on the table. His lawyer leaned forward, laying a gentle hand on his back. Jacob flinched, and he removed it.

"Remember what we talked about," he urged the man in a low voice, putting on a more compassionate tone now, one Mike easily saw through.

Jacob shook his head again, hands still covering his face. "I can't do this," he repeated.

"Can't do what, Jacob?" Mike interjected, latching onto the doubt in his voice.

He looked up from his hands. Meeting Mike's gaze, something he found there strengthened his resolve, and he took in a deep breath.

"I can't let this go to trial."

Sanders' head dropped and he pinched the bridge of his nose, exasperated.

"If this goes to trial, you're gonna tell them that Sarah lied about knowing where I was?" Jacob asked, pleading with his eyes for Mike to answer.

"Yes," he replied quickly, grasping at the chance to add to his second thoughts. "I don't have a choice. If this goes to trial, Sarah *will* be implicated. There's no way around it."

"She *should* be implicated," Sanders scoffed. "She committed a felony."

Mike barked a hard laugh. "Oh, look who suddenly cares about justice."

"Just shut up," Jacob groaned, tugging his fingers through his hair. "I need to think."

Sanders turned back to his client. "Jacob, we've talked about this. You're sick. You need help. Judge Collins is notoriously soft on NGRI cases," he said, desperation seeping into his voice. "In the history of my entire career, I've never gotten this lucky with a Judge, and you want to throw that away? For a *girl*?"

Jacob breathed evenly, turning his gaze back to Mike. Their eyes connected for a long moment, and hope burned like a wild fire deep in Mike's gut.

Someone knocked on the door.

Sanders huffed an irritated sigh. "What?!" he demanded of the intruder.

A middle-aged woman in a powder blue pant suit peeked her head through the door. "Judge Collins is ready for you."

Her gaze landed on each of the men, and she popped back out of the room quickly as she sensed the tension.

Sanders pushed back from the table, standing and walking briskly to his desk to gather his court documents, muttering frustrations to himself as he did.

"Take care of her," Jacob said quietly to Mike. Catching his gaze again, he added, "And, um... you should ask her out or something. You'd be good for her."

Mike stifled the eye-roll that threatened to come out at that. Instead he nodded, giving the man as much of a smile as he could manage.

Jacob gave him one firm nod in return, and Mike knew it was more than a gesture. It was a promise. He was changing his plea. He wasn't going to make anyone take the stand.

The men stood as Counselor Sanders urgently ushered them out the door. In the hall, Mike turned back to Jacob. He offered him a handshake, a silent gesture of solidarity to seal the deal, in case Jacob had any lingering doubts about his decision. They shook, and Mike saw nothing but clear resolve in his eyes.

As he turned around, he caught a glimpse of Sarah across the hall, frowning in confusion at the exchange. He quickly headed for the men's room to avoid her questions. She would find out soon enough, and he didn't want to get her hopes up for a result that may not come.

As much as he wanted to believe this could really be so easy, as sincere as Jacob seemed with his doubts and his ultimate decision, Mike refused to let the hope overcome him. There was still time for Jacob to change his mind. He would believe it when he saw it.

He turned on the faucet, splashing cool water across his face and rubbing it dry with a paper towel. He waited in the bathroom until he heard the announcement that Jacob's trial had begun, to avoid Sarah. Then, with hesitant anticipation, he straightened his tie, stood tall, and made his way to the courtroom.

