

**A sample of  
VIOLATED  
by Carolyn Arnold**



**POLICE PROCEDURALS RESPECTED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT.™**

“Carolyn Arnold provides entertainment and accuracy.”

—*Michael D. Scott, Patrolman (Ret.), Castroville, Texas, United States*

“Carolyn Arnold writes realistic and entertaining police procedurals with characters so real, I lose myself in her books.”

—*Deputy Rebecca Hendrix, LeFlore County Sheriff’s Department, Poteau, Oklahoma, United States*

“For Police procedurals that are painstakingly researched and accurately portrayed look no further than Carolyn Arnold’s works. The only way it gets more real than this is to leave the genre completely.”

—*Zach Fortier, Police Officer (Ret.), Colorado, United States*

**CAROLYN ARNOLD**

**VIOLATED**

**HIBBERT & STILES**  
≡ PUBLISHING INC. ≡



*Violated* (Book 5 in the Brandon Fisher FBI series)  
Copyright © 2016 by Carolyn Arnold

Excerpt from *Ties That Bind* (Book 1 in the Detective Madison Knight series) copyright © 2011 by Carolyn Arnold

[www.carolynarnold.net](http://www.carolynarnold.net)

2016 Hibbert & Stiles Publishing Inc. Edition

All rights reserved. The scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the author constitutes unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), prior written permission must be obtained by contacting the author.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

ISBN (e-book): 978-1-988064-71-0

ISBN (print): 978-1-988064-70-3

*To Chelsea...*

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”

—*Søren Kierkegaard*

## PROLOGUE

**MONDAY, AUGUST 24TH, 11:10 PM PACIFIC TIME**  
**CANYON COUNTRY, CALIFORNIA**

THE MARK WAS IN HIS FORTIES, had no kids, and worked a white-collar job. Average height, average looks. Nothing was truly memorable about him except for his uncommon first name, and that was only because it belonged to a character from a popular eighties movie.

Ferris Hall.

She had followed him to some honky-tonk in Canyon Country, an unsavory location at any time of day, but factor in the late hour and it was even worse. But Ferris had chosen this dive as his hunting ground. Women were easier to lure in with a little chemical persuasion, and that was easy to pass off around here.

He entered the bar with head held high, his back straight, the tease of a smirk on his lips—the end of the evening a foregone conclusion in his mind. He was sipping on his first bourbon, though he was acting as if he was on his third by slurring his words and talking loudly. He'd even thrown a sway into his swagger. Somehow he always managed to make his eyes look bloodshot, too, furthering the charade. And the women would come. And the women would fall for his tricks.

Tonight, she'd be that woman, but she'd be his last. He had to learn there was a price to pay for his actions.

She was sitting down the bar from him. Occasionally, he'd pass her a look—the predatory kind that made her blood boil. She smiled at him, doing her best to convey carnal hunger with her gaze, smearing on a seductive curve to her lips. She dipped her

finger into her manhattan and sucked on it—the cherry juice sweet, the whiskey bitter.

Ferris was off his stool and sidling up her to within three seconds.

The ruse worked every time. It also helped that she exploited what nature had given her—a slender frame and shapely legs. High heels accentuated her well-defined calf muscles, and men stared when she walked into a room. When she paired even higher stilettos with a short skirt and crossed her legs, men's mouths tended to fall open. She utilized all these virtues tonight.

She flashed another sultry smile, and he lifted his glass toward her before tilting his own back and draining it. He set it back on the bar and knocked on it to get the bartender's attention.

"I'll have another on the rocks and—" he rolled his head toward her—"get the lady whatever she'd like."

*Time to feign innocence and flattery.*

She waved a dismissive hand in his direction. "I really shouldn't."

She saw the quick look he gave her glass before meeting her eyes again. "Nonsense. Please, it would be my treat."

If she stripped his voice of its candy-coated tone, his words were pushy and controlling.

"Well"—she angled her glass, showing how little of her drink she had left—"only if you're sure."

If she had actually been given a chance to prove her acting skills, she could be living in a sprawling mansion by now.

"Absolutely. What will it be?" Ferris asked, a grin teasing his lips as he tugged down on his left earlobe. It wasn't hard for her to figure out what was going on. Ferris was asking for something "special" to be added to her drink—the "special" being some kind of date-rape drug.

She lifted her glass to the bartender. "Another manhattan."

"Coming right up." The tender left to make their drinks, and she watched him, taking the time to calm her heartbeat and flow of adrenaline.

"I like a woman who can handle her whiskey." Ferris was

looking quite comfortable beside her now. He was fully facing her, his left elbow perched on the counter, and he wasn't discreet about his drifting gaze, which gravitated to her thighs.

"What can I say? I'm a little whiskey girl." The words from the country song rolled off her tongue, cinching her gut, but she had to do what was necessary to pull him in.

"Toby Keith," he said.

"Pardon?"

"Toby Keith." He pointed to a speaker on the ceiling. "The singer who sings that one."

"Ah, yes." And here, she thought she was doing well by knowing it was even a country song. She smiled at him again. He truly thought of himself as a woman's man.

*Pathetic.*

"Have I seen you here before?" he asked.

She dipped her head.

"I knew it. I never forget a beautiful face. So what's your name?"

"Names really aren't important, are they, baby?" She extended her hand, her long, narrow fingers bowing before him in feminine elegance.

"Oh, she's mysterious. I like it." He kissed the back of her hand, and she was proud of herself for not rolling her eyes.

The bartender returned and placed their drinks in front of them. "Here you go."

From her observations, Ferris seemed to keep a running tab here. Rape now, pay later?

Oh, and Ferris would pay...

"You never told me your name," she said, falling into her role.

"Oh, I can tell you mine, but you can't—"

"Uh-huh." She sucked on the tip of her finger again.

"Ferris." He still held onto her other hand, and she pulled it back shyly.

"Are you from around here?" she asked, resorting to the necessity of small talk.

"I just fly in from time to time for business."

"Ah." She'd have to call upon her acting skills for this

performance. She knew he lived less than three miles away from this place. "What business?"

He tapped his jacket pockets, then slid a hand inside one. "How embarrassing. I don't have any cards with me. Besides, I don't really want to bore you. Why don't we talk about you?" He leaned toward her and lifted his rocks glass. "To a fun night."

"To one we won't remember."

They toasted, and he took a long pull of the amber liquid. She pressed her own glass to her lips and pretended to take a sip.

"Wow, this is good stuff." She licked her lips and hopped off the stool.

"Hey, where are you going?"

"To the washroom. Wanna come?" She knew he'd decline. He liked to carry out his acts of violation in privacy.

"Nah, but I'll be waiting here for you."

*I'm sure you will.*

She grabbed her glass and sauntered off to the restrooms. "A girl can never be too careful," she tossed over her shoulder to him.

The bathroom reeked of cheap perfume and urine. Grime was embedded in the tile, which was likely unredeemable even if someone used a heavy-duty scrub brush on it.

She dipped her fingers into her glass, splashed the whiskey on her neck as if it were a fragrance, and dumped two-thirds of the drink down the drain. Afterward, she studied her eyes in the pitted mirror, but she dared not to look too deep or she'd get swallowed by the darkness in her soul. Her irises swirled with pent-up rage from a lifetime of heartbreak and betrayal.

She left the restroom and staggered back toward Ferris. When she saw him watching, she bumped into an unoccupied table. She went to set her drink down on the surface but let go of it. The glass rolled across the table, stopping shy of going over the edge, but the alcohol spilled. She grabbed the table to right herself and saw that Ferris was hurrying over.

"How embarrassing. Whiskey goes right to my head." She slapped her forehead and laughed huskily.

“It is good for that.” He put his hands on her sides, copping a feel of her breast while “helping” her straighten up. There was no apology for the grope—not that she expected one.

She ran her hands along her skirt. “How about we get out of here?”

“Sure thing,” he said with a wink.

“Wonderful.” She touched his brow, brushing back a strand of his hair with her fingers. Then she leaned in toward him, his arm around her, and they left the bar.

In the parking lot outside, Ferris helped her into his car, and before she could buckle her seat belt, he had his tongue down her throat. It was time to pretend she was enjoying this and somehow manage not to throw up in his mouth.

Minutes later, he pulled back, breathless, his eyes narrowed in arousal. “So what do you say? Should we take this someplace else?”

She narrowed her eyes. “Why not.”

He peeled out of the lot, wheels squealing on the pavement, and not long later, flickering orange lights announced they’d reached their destination: MOTEL. It was a seedy place where rooms were rented by the hour.

He parked in view of the lobby and went in while she stayed in the car. She watched him hand over some cash, and he was quickly on his way back to her. His steps were lighter now, and any pretense of feeling the alcohol was gone. As far as he was concerned, the show was no longer necessary.

She leaned against the headrest and lolled her head toward him. She pretended that she wanted to smile but couldn’t quite form the expression, giving the impression that the drug was setting in. He helped her out of the car and into the room.

Inside, she could make out a double bed across from a dresser and TV. A couple of chairs and a round table barely big enough for two were in front of the window that faced the parking lot. The curtains were already drawn, and when he hit the light switch to the left of the door, she winced and covered her eyes.

He laughed. “A little bright for you? Come on, let’s sit on the

bed.”

*Yeah, let's sit.*

She slipped out of her heels and pretended to stumble a bit as she headed toward him. She was giggling as she dragged her purse by its strap behind her.

He patted the mattress. “Come on, baby.”

“Why don't you take your clothes off, and I'll—” She sucked on a finger.

“Don't have to ask me twice.” He wasted no time tossing aside his clothing and lying back on the bed. His white body obviously never saw the sun, and his erection was already full. She swallowed the bile that rose in her throat. Even though violators like Ferris normally preferred to dominate liaisons like this, most men couldn't refuse the offer of a blowjob.

“How about a little bondage?” She eyed the barred headboard. This would be too easy...

“Nah, let's just—”

She pulled out a pair of cuffs from her purse and snapped one end on his wrist and the other to the headboard before he could protest.

“Hmm, you like to be in charge? Well, so do I.” He whipped his body off the bed as far as he could and yanked on her hair with his free hand, pulling her to him, mouth to mouth—all tongue and domination. She pretended to like it for a few seconds and then pulled back, teasing him.

“Let me see your tits.” His eyes were narrowed slits, and a mischievous grin twisted his lips.

She was still standing, and she rocked on her feet in an attempt to break free of his hold. She stumbled backward, but he never let go of her hair and pain seared her scalp.

“Get naked.” His tone held impatience now.

She needed to fully restrain him before she could put the rest of her plan into action. Body size alone indicated that he could overpower her. She was about five foot nine and 130 pounds, and Ferris was six foot two, 220. At least one wrist was already bound to the headboard.

He let go of her, and she stepped well out of his reach. His swipes at the air to reach her kept coming up short. She ducked and picked up her purse again.

“Please, just a little patience. I promise it will be worth the wait.” She walked around the end of the bed and pulled out another set of cuffs.

“This is not fucking cute anymore.” Anger coated his face, wrinkling his brow and darkening his eyes.

“I get you off, and then you can do whatever you want to me.”

“I say that happens now.”

“Lie back on the bed again. Please.” She played coy and teasing, tossing in another deep-throated suck on her index finger just for the hell of it. Men were so simpleminded.

Ferris relented and got back into position.

She moved stealthily around the other side of the bed and secured his other wrist to the frame.

Any hint of modesty now gone, she assumed the role of dominatrix. “Are you sure you can handle it?”

“Oh, I can handle you.” He thrust his hips forward and clenched his jaw with hunger. “But can you handle me?”

The sound of his voice was nauseating. She couldn’t wait to silence him.

With both his arms pinned, she returned to the end of the bed.

“Take your fucking clothes off!” he barked.

“Why rush things?” She pulled out two more sets of cuffs. The chains on these ones were long enough to reach the bedframe. She restrained his legs, even as he squirmed.

“Now, take your fucking clothes off,” he hissed.

“First things first.” She took a roll of duct tape out of her purse and ripped off a strip.

“What the—” His impatient squirming had turned to resistant bucking, but she got the tape in place.

She casually looked at him from the end of the bed. His erection was softening, his eyes finally showing fear. And she hadn’t even given him anything to be afraid of.

Yet.

It must have been something in her energy and what she was communicating without words. It would have been clear by now that she wasn't drugged, that she was actually the one in control here.

She drew her knife from its sheath and studied the blade.

He was trying to say something, but from behind the tape, it came out as mumbling. He jerked his body as if pure determination would free him. His eyes widened, and fear transformed into outright panic.

"Let's get on with this night we won't remember, shall we? Or should I say you won't remember it, because you'll be—" She thrust the blade into his testicles. His screams weren't much more than a whisper behind the tape, though tears streamed from his eyes, terror streaking through them.

She stabbed him a few more times and then, with one swipe, rid him of what had been his weapon. It would take him awhile to bleed out, but she was prepared to stay with him until the end.

## CHAPTER 1

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25TH, 1:30 PM EASTERN TIME  
FBI HEADQUARTERS, QUANTICO, VIRGINIA

I'D NEVER UNDERSTAND WOMEN—at least not one woman in particular. But I wasn't about to admit it out loud when my job with the FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit required that I successfully assess other people's states of mind. For the life of me, though, I couldn't figure out what had gotten into my colleague and ex-lover Paige Dawson or why she'd decided to take off and go to California with a man she hardly knew. But I sensed there was more to it.

I knew she'd recently lost a childhood friend, but it wasn't a tragic accident that had suddenly claimed her life. Really, she'd been merely existing as it was, as her life for the past twenty-some years had consisted of being hooked up to a ventilator. It wasn't until a couple of weeks ago that the woman's mother decided to pull the plug. I could only guess how Paige was feeling, and maybe a getaway was exactly what she needed to process it all. It wasn't like she discussed her emotions with me anymore.

We'd decided to end our romantic relationship—if it could be called that—not long before she took up with what's-his-name, actually. Speaking of what's-his-name, she was probably snuggling up to him at some bar while I was buried in paperwork from the last case. Murderers killed people *and* trees.

"How's it coming along, Brandon?" Zach asked.

I hadn't even noticed that he had returned from lunch. It was a rarity that the senior profiler even took one. His desk was about three feet from mine. That meant zero privacy, but it did

encourage open communication.

Thinking of being posted behind a desk made me feel useless, as if my time could be put to no better use. Here we were, stuck pushing paperwork while as many as fifty active serial killers targeted their next victims.

I looked over at Zach. "I assume you're referring to all these reports?" I splayed my hand over the paperwork, and he nodded. "Oh, it's coming along *wonderfully*."

"You do know sarcasm is anger's ugly cousin, right?"

"It's also a sign of intelligence."

Zach smirked, a spark lighting his eyes.

I narrowed my gaze at him. Something was different. "Who is she?" I asked.

His eyes widened, a subtle blush coming to his cheeks. "Excuse me?"

"The woman you're seeing. I take it by your bright-red lips, you've either taken to wearing lipstick or you've been kissing. *Heavily*." I was the one smirking now. Zach, however, was stark serious.

Maybe I shouldn't press my luck. I had just become a full-fledged agent, having only passed my probationary status last month. But it was too much fun to tease him after he'd done it to me for so long with that damn nickname he'd had for me, "Pending." He certainly couldn't call me that anymore.

"Brandon, mind your own business," he snapped.

"Ah, so it's serious... That's why you don't want to talk about it."

He shuffled some papers around on his desk with no apparent purpose. "I never said that."

"You never denied it." I paused for a second, but he never continued. "Redhead? Blonde? Brunette?"

"I like how you started with redhead." He locked his gaze on mine, an obvious dig at me for having a thing with Paige.

I shrugged. "That's in the past."

"So you two keep telling me. But I guess it must be true if she's on vacation with Sam, huh?"

Zach might be a genius and older than my thirty-one years, but at times he had the maturity of a college student.

The glint in his eyes—in addition to his words—hinted that he hadn't expected me to know.

I flicked a glance at him, then back to my work. "I'm well aware."

That's as far as the conversation went. I couldn't afford to concern myself with Paige's love life. Besides, I was seeing someone myself. I met her during a previous case. Her name was Becky, and she was a police officer for Dumfries PD. It was nothing serious, but we enjoyed each other's company.

Zach chuckled, and the tapping of his fingers on his keyboard told me I was free from any further teasing for the moment. There were times I could strangle the guy. He had the tendency to push buttons and then stand back, awaiting a reaction. Maybe it had to do with him not having any siblings to torment while growing up. However, I was an only child and I turned out perfectly fine.

I turned my attention back to thoughts of Becky. We had plans to meet for drinks at the Earth and Evergreen Restaurant near her place, which was about twenty minutes north of Quantico. And if everything went according to plan, I'd be spending the night with her and coming back in the morning.

I conjured up the smell of her perfume and the softness of her skin beneath my fingers—

My cell phone rang, breaking me from the beginnings of my fantasy and wresting me back into the real world.

"Agent Fisher." I had answered without checking the caller ID, but the ensuing silence on the other end of the line had me pulling back the phone and consulting it now.

SANTA CLARITA V.

*That tells me nothing...*

"Hello? This is Special Agent Brandon Fisher. Can I help you?" I looked for Zach, but he was gone again.

There was no verbal response on the other end of the line, but I heard a distinct exhale, followed by more deep breaths.

Santa Clarita... Where was that? It sounded Californian.

And I knew only one person in California.

“Paige?”

There was a jagged intake of breath. A sob, maybe?

“Oh God, Brandon.” It was Paige, and she was definitely crying. And Paige didn’t cry. I’d witnessed the odd tear fall when our relationship had ended, but this was different. Something was very wrong.

I leaned on my desk and looked around, but no one was nearby.

“What’s going on? Are you okay?” I asked. I gave her a few seconds to respond. She didn’t. “Where’s Sam? Is he okay? Talk to me, Paige.”

“Shh. I don’t want everyone to know.”

“What’s going on?” I was starting to get annoyed that she was avoiding my question. She was the one who had called me.

“I’m in trouble,” she began. “Big trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“I’m in...jail,” she ground out.

Her words struck me as a physical blow. I even stopped breathing for a second. I sank back into my chair. “You’re what?”

“There’s been a misunderstanding is all.”

*I’d hope so...*

“Where is Sam?” I asked again.

“Please, Brandon, don’t tell Jack or Zach.”

Another aversion tactic. “I don’t know much to tell.” My concern for her was quickly morphing into irritation. “Where’s Sam?” I repeated a third time. Maybe I should record myself and just hit “play.”

Another deep exhale into the receiver.

“Talk to me,” I entreated.

“He doesn’t know.”

“What? How can he not know you were—”

“Shh! I can’t explain everything over the phone. I need you to get me a good defense attorney and send him to the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff’s Station. Have them ask for Detective Grafton or Mendez.”

A *good* defense attorney?

“What are you suspected of?”

“I don’t want—”

“You called me, remember?”

She sighed. “Something I might be regretting...”

“I’m sorry, but you asked me to get you—”

Jack came up next to my desk. He ran a hand along his throat, indicating my call needed to end. Now. And based on the way he was staring me down, refusing him wasn’t an option.

“Where’s Zach?” he asked.

“God, is that Jack?” Paige whispered. “Brandon, you can’t say a—”

I cupped the receiver portion of my cell phone and held it away from my ear. “He’ll be back,” I told Jack. “He probably just went to the bathroom.”

“Hang up,” Jack demanded. He never tolerated personal calls on the job, but this was going overboard. Besides, this particular one wasn’t personal. Or was it?

And why did Paige call me and not Sam? Was it just that I was familiar, or did she not want to give the new guy a bad impression? I dismissed the idea of her still harboring feelings for me before I even considered it, but whatever it was, I wasn’t sure I was completely comfortable with it.

I got up from my chair and walked away from Jack, taking my cell phone with me. I had it pressed to my ear again and could tell Paige was still on the line. I could feel Jack’s eyes watching me, but so far, he wasn’t following.

“I will do what you asked,” I said into the receiver, “but it would help to know what you’re...you know.” I didn’t want to say *being charged with*, seeing as Jack was still within earshot.

“I don’t want to get into it with you, Brandon. Hell, I probably shouldn’t have even called you. I just thought I could trust you.”

“You can.” The words had come out of their own volition.

“Thank you. I just need a defense attorney who is good at getting the innocent off—” Someone spoke to her in the background. “Yes, I know... Fine,” she said, her voice muffled, probably from her hand over the receiver. Then back to me. “I’ve

got to go.”

“I’ll get you someone.”

“Remember, Detective Graft—”

“Grafton and Mendez. I got it.”

“One more thing, Brandon. Please let Sam know I’m okay.”

“And what about the part where you were...” I couldn’t elaborate as Jack was now literally breathing down my neck.

“You can’t tell him I’ve been arrested.”

“Yeah, okay.”

“Can I trust you or not?” she asked impatiently.

I nodded even though she couldn’t see it. “You can.”

“Sam’s at the Hyatt Regency, room 328.” Then she hung up. With the conversation over, I was left to face Jack, and based on his epic scowl, I was going to have explain why I didn’t hang up the second he had told me to.

“I need to make another phone call,” I said.

“Not right now you don’t,” Jack replied.

Zach came back to his desk, a confused look on his face when he saw the two of us, and Jack gestured for us to follow him into his office.

I was pacing in front of Jack’s door, not wanting to go in because I needed to get Paige that lawyer ASAP.

Jack gripped my shoulder with a firm hand. “Go inside.”

“Uh, yeah. On it.” I pressed on a smile and went into his office.

Jack shut the door and didn’t bother to take a seat. Neither did Zach or I, but the two of us kept looking at each other for a clue as to what this was about.

“Paige has been brought in as a murder suspect.” Jack delivered the statement as if it were any other case—direct, punchy, and succinct.

I swallowed roughly, my throat so dry I wondered if my mouth was even producing any saliva. I sought out one of the chairs that were positioned in front of Jack’s desk.

Jack’s gaze followed me until I sat down. “That was Paige on the phone with you, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah,” I choked out.

His jaw tightened. He shook his head. “Unbelievable.”

I wasn’t exactly sure what he was referring to—Paige’s arrest or my consorting with the...enemy?

Jack closed his eyes. “She just couldn’t leave it alone.”

“Leave what alone?” Zach asked.

Jack let out a heaving sigh, met my eyes, and then turned for the door. “Come on, we’re going to California. I’ll explain on the plane.”

## CHAPTER 2

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 25TH, 4:47 AM PACIFIC TIME**  
**VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA**

IT WAS EARLIER THAT MORNING and Paige was standing in the window of the hotel room, looking down on the town's streets and watching people carry on with their lives. Sam was still asleep, and last she looked, he was on his back with one leg under the sheets, one over. It felt good to get away from her job, but this vacation wasn't really for pleasure. Sam had tried to convince her they could also have some fun while in Valencia, but Paige had only one thing on her mind: confronting the man who had destroyed her friend Natasha's life.

It had happened twenty-two years ago when they were on spring break in Mexico, but the repercussions had lasted a lifetime. Natasha had been gang-raped by a group of four guys they had met at the resort. It had led to a suicide attempt a year later that resulted in Natasha losing all brain activity, and after all this time, Natasha's mother had finally decided it was time to say good-bye to her daughter. The funeral service was unbelievably rough on Paige, but it provided her with the one lead she needed to find the group's leader. That was the real reason she was in California...

"Paige?"

She turned to find Sam lying on his side now, braced on his elbow. She walked over and sat next to him.

He placed a hand on her back and maneuvered to look at the clock. She followed the direction of his gaze. "What are you

doing up so early?” he asked.

“I couldn’t sleep.” She wasn’t going to get into everything with Sam. Like how she had slipped out last night and took a trial run past the rapist’s house, how she had followed him... Some things were best left unsaid.

“You don’t have to see this Ferris guy, you know. I would understand if you changed your mind.”

She pressed her lips together and nodded. “I know, but we’ve come all this way.”

He took her hand and tapped a kiss to her fingertips. “It’s never too late to just turn this into a fun vacation.”

The words stung. *A fun vacation*. She felt as though she had cheated him. They each only had a few weeks of vacation time a year, and she’d talked him into using his to follow her out here. “I never should have asked you to—”

“Hey.” He struggled with the sheets a bit as he sat up. “I wanted to come. Remember?”

She stared into his eyes, trying to determine if he was telling the truth, reliving the moment when she had asked him to come along. Maybe she had been wrong to include him in this. He was relatively new to her life; they’d met only a couple of months ago, and with the distance between them—him living in North Dakota and her in Virginia—they had only spent a few weekends together.

“You didn’t make me come here,” he reiterated. “And I’ll be by your side the entire time.”

Paige rose from the bed and crossed her arms. It was warm in the room, but suddenly chills rippled through her. After bringing him all the way here, how could she tell him that she had changed her mind and wanted to approach Ferris on her own? But maybe he’d find relief in being left out of this. She’d do what she needed to do to get closure with Ferris, and then they could have a normal vacation.

“I think this is something I need to do alone,” she said, watching for his reaction.

Sam’s brows lowered in consternation, and he swung his legs

over the side of the bed. “Do you really think that’s smart? Safe? You know what this guy is capable of.” His words were hot and fierce.

“What he was capable of over two decades ago anyway. He could have changed.” She wasn’t going to tell Sam that Ferris had served thirty-six months in prison for sexual assault just seven years ago.

He angled his head to the right. “And you and I know the likelihood of that is slim.”

“Maybe he wasn’t the ringleader I thought he was. Maybe he was pressured by the others to...” For some reason, she couldn’t bring herself to say the word *rape*. Being this close to Ferris was almost too much for her to handle. All those years of trying to track him down just after the rape, of learning a foreign language and even returning to the Cancun resort, and it was all coming to an end.

He came up next to her and took her hands in his. “I understand that you feel you need to see him.”

She took her hands from his, looking away. When she returned her gaze to him, she saw his concern. Where there was once conviction, there was now doubt. “You don’t think I’m taking this too far?”

He splayed his arms to take in the room. “I’m in California, nearly two thousand miles from home. With you.”

She smirked. “Fine. Stupid question.”

“Damn right, it was a stupid question, but I’ll allow you the one. Any more and I’ll need to take it from your hide.” He wrapped his arms around her waist and placed his mouth on hers, his tongue probing, teasing, claiming. She lost herself in the moment, and as he led her back to the bed, she could think of nothing but him. She teased, touched, caressed. She leaned back against the pillow and arched her back as he trailed kisses from her neck down to her breasts. Her breathing became heavy, her desire burning, as Sam began panting, his jaw tight, his energy possessive. When he thrust into her, she let out a moan and she was lost.

SAM ROLLED TO THE OTHER side of the bed. As the heat of sex cooled,

Paige stared at the ceiling, her hands laced over her stomach, thinking about her goal. No matter how much he didn't like it, she'd stick to her conviction to see Ferris on her own. Given the guy's history, maybe she was being foolish and rash, even naive to think she could handle the situation herself. She was emotional enough already and not even face to face with him yet. But she was a trained FBI agent. She had brought down many psychotic unsubs. She had firearms training and could shoot a target from a thousand yards out, easy. She had strong hand-to-hand combat skills and had defended herself against those hell-bent on keeping their secret lives just that, so how was Ferris any different? From a black-and-white perspective, Ferris was no different, except for one thing. With him it would be personal. Her blood chilled even as the warm pulse of adrenaline flowed through her.

She turned to face Sam to find him staring at her.

"You're beautiful, you know that?" He twirled a strand of her red hair around his finger.

She intercepted his hand and held onto it. "I know you're not happy about this, but I need to confront him on my own."

"No." He jumped from the bed, shaking his head. "God, I was hoping you had temporarily lost your mind."

"Gee, thanks."

"You can't go there by yourself. I mean, you *can*, but I wish you wouldn't."

She had hurried around the bed and stood in front of him. "I need you to trust me. Please."

He took her hand but shook his head, his jaw tight. "You're crazy to do this alone."

She kept her eyes locked on him. "I've made up my mind."

"Fine. If that's what you want." He stepped back, snatched a bathrobe off a nearby chair, and wrapped it around him.

"It is."

He wasn't looking at her anymore, just pacing around the room.

"You could hang out at the hotel," Paige added. "Get a massage, use the pool."

“Throw in a mani-pedi and I’m sold.” He met her gaze and then rolled his eyes.

“Listen, I know you’re not happy about—”

“You’re right. I’m not.”

“It will be broad daylight. I’m not going inside his place. Besides, I’ll have my Glock.”

His gaze was hardened steel. “I’d say that’s a smart idea.”

“The gun or staying outside?” she teased.

“Both.” His tone was serious, and based on the jut of his jaw there was nothing she could say to soothe his worry. The only thing that would make him comply was his desire to please her.

“You know what confronting this man means to me...”

After seconds of silent eye contact, he said, “I’ll agree to this stupidity on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“You have breakfast with me first.”

She smiled, but it dulled before reaching her eyes. “You got it.”

## CHAPTER 3

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25TH, 8:45 AM PACIFIC TIME  
CANYON COUNTRY, CALIFORNIA

SAM HAD HARDLY SAID A word at breakfast, which made Paige wonder why he even asked to share the meal with her. Maybe he was hoping that she'd magically change her mind and let him tag along when she went to Ferris's house, but that wasn't going to happen.

She'd taken the rental car and followed the GPS, even though she remembered the way from last night. About a block out from Ferris's house, the laughter and screaming of children playing in a local park filtered through her open window. They were enjoying the summer months the way kids used to, before televisions became babysitters. It was good to see that some kids were still *kids*. She passed abandoned bicycles in driveways and chalk drawings on sidewalks, indicating the area had a lot of families.

She parked the car in front of the correct address and walked to the sidewalk, where she stood and looked at the place Ferris called home. He lived in a newer townhouse with each building consisting of five units. Ferris's was on the end of one such group. A chain-link fence capped the end of his property, and a public walkway trailed between his building and the next.

She walked to the front door and stood there, doubts swimming in her mind.

Did she possess the courage to follow through, to push the past in Ferris's face and make him acknowledge what he had done?

She'd come all this way to do just that, and it certainly wasn't time to back down now.

Her arm felt heavy as she raised it to the knocker. Her fingers grasped the brass, her heart beating so fast, she felt light-headed.

She glanced up and down the street again.

She heard a door open and shut, and a female neighbor from the adjacent unit bounded down her front steps and hurried toward her sedan. She was probably trying to make it to work by nine. It was 8:45.

Did she know that she lived next door to a rapist?

The woman was off without a look toward Ferris's house.

Paige was still holding the knocker, though she hadn't yet used it. Her thoughts were still tumbling over one another in her mind. Would Ferris recognize her? Would his eyes widen in fear if he did? Would he know that it was time to account for his actions, or in the very least own up to the fact that he'd destroyed a young woman's life?

Natasha's face flashed in her mind, and Paige couldn't allow herself to turn away.

She slammed the knocker against the wood.

No sound from inside.

She wanted to get this confrontation done and over with—now. She didn't want to come back again.

Since Ferris had a garage, it was impossible to gauge if he was home based on the lack of a vehicle in the drive. Was he inside and ignoring her, or had he not heard her? All she knew was that she wasn't about to leave without making absolutely sure he wasn't there. If she could get into his yard, there might be a back door she could try.

Her heart bumped off rhythm. Was she really considering going into his backyard?

She knocked again and waited. More silence.

She bit her lip and looked around the neighborhood. All the activity still seemed to be at the park.

Without giving it another thought, she stepped down from his front steps and headed toward the sidewalk between the

two buildings. She glanced at the end unit of the neighboring building, doing her best to be inconspicuous. All the curtains were closed.

She glimpsed over her left shoulder, then her right. She wanted to pick up her pace but managed to retain a casual saunter. Going slightly past the corner of Ferris's lot, she surveyed his yard. It was a small patch of grass with a shed that took up a third of the property. A wooden fence butted up against the building and ran to the back of the yard, separating him and his neighbor. While the woman had left that unit, it was still possible someone else was at home. The divider would provide some privacy, but she didn't really want to explain to anyone why she was in Ferris's yard in the first place. She couldn't see her persistence to reach him standing up against scrutiny.

The flipside was that if Ferris was home and tried anything, no one would be able to help her. But that was ridiculous. She was a skilled—and armed—FBI agent. Where were these moments of self-doubt coming from? Still, nerves had her putting her hand over her holster.

“Karen, wait up!”

Paige jumped and turned in the direction of the young voice. A girl of about seven was racing along the path to catch up to another girl about six years her senior, who smoked past Paige on her bicycle. The younger one seemed to be all legs and not getting anywhere fast on her bike. Streamers hung from the handlebars and spoke beads accented her wheels, catapulting Paige back to her childhood.

Memories of youthful innocence reengaged Paige's focus. She was outside the house of the man who had taken so much from her friend when she was in her early twenties, at a point in life when she was finally coming into her own. Yet, while he had destroyed Natasha's life, he had set Paige's on another course. She came to realize life wasn't easy and it wasn't fair. The optimist in her hadn't wanted to admit defeat and accept that philosophy, though. But now, as an FBI agent, she had the power to at least do something about all the evil in the world. The murderers she

caught paid for their crimes, and she prevented further killings from occurring.

Her gaze returned to Ferris's house. All she was going to do was see if he was home. She lifted the latch on the gate and, with one deep breath, entered his yard.

**You have reached the end of the sample. For purchase options, visit:**

<http://carolynarnold.net/violated/>