

# SLIDERS: BLOODLINE

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## PART ONE

In a hotel room at the Dominion, Wade knew the others packed up around her, but her attention remained focused on the TV in the living room. She lay back on the couch, one foot propped up to press her knee against her chest, her attention riveted to the screen.

Her attention weakened enough to become aware of Professor Arturo approaching her. He pulled on his long black coat as he glanced from her to the TV, then back again.

"Come, Miss Welles," he said. "We'll be sliding in a few minutes. Don't want to be late."

Wade waved him off without diverting her attention from the screen. "I know, professor. Gimme a minute. I wanna see this."

Arturo looked at the screen again. It showed a courtroom, one Wade had become intimately familiar with in the month they had stayed in this world. At the bottom of the screen, next to the CourtTV logo, read the subtitle "Richard Lynch Murder Trial."

Arturo shook his head. "I can't believe you're still watching this ghastly media circus."

Rembrandt looked up from where he packed his clothes. "Yeah, girl, how can you watch that thing?"

Wade tore her attention away from it to look at him. "Because it's interesting. I've never seen a trial live before. Besides, I can't wait to see that sicko Richard Lynch get his just desserts."

Quinn emerged from the bathroom, tucking his toothbrush into his breast pocket. "Sicko's not the right word. The guy kidnaps, tortures, and kills forty-two women and dumps their dismembered bodies into Golden Gate Bay. Makes Jeffrey Dahmer look like a Muppet Baby."

Arturo turned away from the television to stride to the front door. "Well, I for one have had my fill of this so-called Golden Gate Killer. I have never understood the American fascination with grisly murder and mayhem."

Rembrandt grinned at him. "Yeah, well, at least we ain't takin' pictures of our First Lady nude at the beach."

As Rembrandt gave off a high-pitched laugh, Arturo fixed a cool glare on him. "If that was a thinly-veiled dig at our coverage of the Royal Family, then I would care to remind you that not all of us Brits applaud the guerrilla tactics of our tabloid press. That is simply a result of American trash press spilling over onto our shores."

Wade tuned out the others' bickering as she watched the camera sweep over the courtroom. It lingered on a man seated at a table next to a lawyer. The man's calm, handsome face etched in her mind, Richard Lynch. The human monster the press had dubbed the Golden Gate Killer.

For a moment, Lynch turned his attention away from the judge to the camera. As his blue eyes focused on it, Wade felt as if he looked right at her. She couldn't hold back a shiver that ran through her. He seemed like something out of a nightmare.

The bailiff spoke. "All rise. This court is now in session. The honorable judge Carter Packard now presiding."

Everyone in the courtroom stood as the judge walked into the room. He ordered everyone to be seated, then fixed his gaze on Lynch.

"Mister Lynch," he said, "you have been found guilty of the murders of forty-two young women, and it has been passed to me to decide your fate. The casual and defiant nature to which you performed these crimes is well-documented. Your careless disregard for human life is evident in every single act

of atrocity you committed. And your determination to continue to feed your bloodlust is without question, as evidenced by your assault on three guards in your prison cell. For this reason, I see no alternative but to sentence you to death by electrocution."

The courtroom erupted in cheers, drowning out the judge's formal description of the execution. Lynch's smile remained constant throughout as the audience laughed and hugged each other.

"Yes," Wade whispered. "Take that, you maniac."

Quinn touched her shoulder. "Hey, come on, Wade, we can't push it any closer to the wire."

"Yeah, okay." Wade switched off the TV and jogged after them. "You hear that, guys? Lynch is gonna fry."

"No, he won't, Miss Welles," Arturo said. "He'll be filing appeals until the millennium. Besides, I fail to see why it concerns us. This is not our world. And his death serves to aid our quest in no way whatsoever."

Wade swept her portable tape recorder and tapes into her coat pocket. "Boy, professor, could you be any more coldblooded? This guy killed people."

"Of which I am aware, and distraught. But as I've said before, it is important not to get too wrapped up in the worlds we encounter. We must stay focused on the task at hand - getting home."

"Whatever. Let's go, guys." Wade let the others walk out ahead of her, looked back at their hotel room, then shut the door behind her.

The slide took place in an alley behind the Dominion. They landed in their new world with relative ease and strode out onto the street. Wade scanned the place for some sign of a change from their own world. She found none.

"So far, so good," Rembrandt said. "Looks like home."

"Yes," Arturo murmured. "But we certainly should investigate. A newspaper should provide us with vital clues."

They headed off in a group towards a newsstand by the Lamplighter Bar and Grill across the street. Wade trotted after them, still thinking about Lynch. The exhibits the prosecution had shown during the trial were etched in her mind. She hoped she'd one day be able to get that monster out of her thoughts, but not today.

The newsstand had a wide variety of newspapers and magazines. As Arturo selected a copy of the *Chronicle*, Wade's eyes roamed the racks. She wondered if she should spare a few dollars from her budget to pick up a copy of *PC World*. She'd be interested in seeing what computer technology looked like in this world.

The words were out of her mouth the moment she saw it. "Oh, no."

Arturo flipped through his newspaper, but froze.

Quinn and Rembrandt looked back at her standing before the racks, staring down at the *National Inquiry*.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?" Rembrandt asked.

Wade pointed at the *Inquiry* with a finger she couldn't keep from trembling. They all read the headline and fell into a horrified silence as well.

The headline read "Golden Gate Killer Strikes Again. Forty-Ninth Body Found in Golden Gate Bay."

Wade looked up at the others. "In this world, they haven't caught Lynch."

## PART TWO

Wade bought the *National Inquiry* while the others rented a room at the Dominion Hotel. She read as she walked into their hotel room.

Rembrandt rubbed his hands together as he entered the room. "Yeah, this is more like it. Lot bigger room than when we stayed here last time."

Quinn shrugged off his jacket and hung it on a hook by the front door. "Okay, first order of business is finding out if we're home."

Arturo had his copy of the *Chronicle* under his arm, but unfolded it. "I think not, Mister Mallory. I took the liberty of checking the weather section of this newspaper. Apparently, today's temperature will be fifteen-point-two latecs. I have never heard of that measurement of temperature."

Rembrandt dropped onto the couch. "Think maybe the US switched to a new system while we were gone?"

Arturo raised an eyebrow. "I hardly think so, Mister Brown. When we left, America still refused to adopt the metric system."

"So we're not home," Quinn said. "Well, at least we won't be stuck here too long. We slide in about an hour and a half."

He took off his jacket as he looked at Wade. She still had her nose in the articles on the Golden Gate Killer. "Wade? You okay?"

Wade never looked up from her reading. "They haven't caught him. They haven't caught Richard Lynch."

Quinn glanced at Rembrandt. "Yeah, uh, we know, Wade. You mentioned it before."

Wade looked up at him. "But don't you get it? He's killed forty-nine women in this world. In the last one, he only killed forty-two. That's seven women who died, all because Lynch is still running around free."

Quinn sat down at a table in a corner of the room. "Yeah, I know. It's sucks."

Wade stared at him, a single thought running through her mind. She tried to stop herself, but couldn't help from voicing it. "We can stop him."

The others stared at her, silent, frozen. Rembrandt's arm still reached for the TV. Arturo stood in the middle of pouring himself some whiskey. Quinn had pulled his timer out of his pocket. But all of them now looked at her.

"What did you say?" Arturo asked.

"You heard me," Wade said. "We can stop him. The police don't know who's committing all these murders. We do."

Arturo put down his glass. "No, we don't, Miss Welles. This is a different world. For all we know, this could be a totally different murderer, completely unrelated to the last world."

Wade thrust the newspaper at him. "No, it's not, professor. The murders are exactly the same. The women go into the park and disappear. Three days later, the police get an anonymous tip to check the bay. They find the women dismembered, cut into equal portions with razors--"

Rembrandt clutched his stomach. "Come on, Wade, I just ate."

Wade lowered the newspaper. "Well, you get the point. It's exactly the same. The only difference is that, in this world, Lynch didn't get caught dumping one of the bodies. But we can stop him. Turn him in."

"No, we cannot," Arturo said. "May I remind you that the justice system requires something to

charge people with the crime of murder, namely evidence. Do you think you can just phone up the police and tell them to arrest a man because you saw him convicted of the crimes in another dimension?"

Wade felt her pulse quicken. "So we get evidence. We get proof. Then we give it to the police. All we need to do is point them in the right direction, that's all. Come on, we can do it."

Rembrandt looked at Quinn and shrugged. "I dunno. Maybe we can."

"Out of the question," Arturo said. "Miss Welles, for the billionth time, I must insist that we not interfere with other worlds. And trying to arrest a serial killer is exactly that."

Wade folded her arms. "So whadda you want us to do, professor? Just ignore it? Let this guy go free? Kill who knows how many more women?"

Arturo held out his hands as if speaking to a child. "That's why they have police. To capture people who commit crimes. Let's just let them do their jobs."

"They only caught him on the last world by accident! Suppose that doesn't happen in this world? Suppose they never catch him? Or suppose they do, but only after he's killed a hundred more women?"

Arturo's voice rose even higher. "But what if you're wrong? What if Lynch is not the killer in this world? What if you find your so-called proof, and send an innocent man to the electric chair?"

"Guys!" Quinn yelled, then said, "Okay, everybody calm down. Now look, Wade, we're only in this world for a little while. I don't think there's enough time to track down a killer."

"Oh, come on," Wade said. "Don't tell me you're on the professor's side."

"Yeah," Rembrandt said. "I mean, don't you think we got an obligation to do what's right? If we let this guy go free and do nothin', then we're responsible for what he does. That's as bad as killin' those women ourselves."

"But the professor's right," Quinn said. "We don't have any proof that Lynch is the killer. And even if he is, what can we do about it?"

Wade tossed the *Inquiry* onto the dining table. "Well, I don't care what any of you say. If you won't help me, fine, I'll do it on my own. But I'm not gonna just sit here while another woman gets hacked up somewhere out there. I'm spending all my time in this world to track Lynch down."

She charged towards the front door with a powerful stride. As she grabbed the doorknob, a firm hand rested on her shoulder.

It belonged to Arturo. "I'll go with you, Miss Welles. But not because I wish to aid you in this ridiculous adventure. My main concern is to make sure that this is carried out in the proper fashion. Promise me that we will collect solid, conclusive evidence before making any kind of statement to the police. And that we will not endanger our lives in this pursuit."

Wade grinned. "You got it."

"Okay," Quinn sighed. "Be careful out there."

"Yeah," Rembrandt said. "Watch your backs, guys."

Wade nodded, then pulled open the door. She walked out into the lobby and headed down the stairs, followed by Arturo.

"I cannot believe I'm doing this," Arturo murmured.

Wade hailed a cab and gave the driver an address. As they headed across San Francisco, Arturo looked at her from where he sat next to her. "Exactly where are we headed, Miss Welles?"

"Lynch was a gardener," Wade said. "Ran a small business called Treetop Gardening. I remember 'cause he used a lot of his equipment on the women he killed."

"Delightful. And exactly why are we going to this establishment?"

"Because that's where Lynch is. And I wanna see him, face-to-face. I know who and what he is, and he's bound to let something slip. That's why I brought this."

Wade opened her coat to reveal her tape recorder. "If I can get him to slip up, I can get a confession

out of him that we can send to the police."

"Interesting plan," Arturo said. "Of course, if Lynch is not the killer, then all this is futile."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." Wade tucked the recorder deeper into her pocket, and pulled her jacket over it. It seemed virtually undetectable.

The cab dropped them off in front of a small shop with the green, flowery logo "Treetop Gardening" over the door. A small bell tied to the handle of the door rang as Wade pushed the door open.

Darkness filled the inside of the shop, the only light coming from the picture window in the front. The back of the shop cloaked with shadows. The smell of fresh earth mingled in the air, carried by the gardening tools mounted on all the walls.

Knives, shears, hoes, and rakes hung on nails all around Wade, their sharp edges catching the light.

The door in the back of the shop opened on squealing hinges. Richard Lynch walked through it. Only when Wade saw him did she realize the job lying ahead of her. Up until that moment, she had only seen Lynch through a TV screen. Like seeing a lion through the bars of a cage. Frightening, but with a sense of distance knowing it couldn't reach you. But now Lynch stood in front of Wade, his blue eyes looking straight at her instead of through a camera lens. There were no policemen or bars to protect her now.

Lynch smiled as he looked at her, the same smile he had worn throughout his trial. "Can I help you?"

Wade opened her mouth to recite the speech she had planned. Her voice wouldn't come out. She could hardly breathe. She tried again. Only by working her throat hard did she manage to speak.

"Hi," she breathed, trying not to let her voice tremble. "I'm Wade. This is my husband, Max. Um, we were wondering if you could do our lawn. It's a mess."

Lynch opened a ratty notebook on his desk. Shadows fell over his face as he lowered it to read the book. "Well, my rates are by the square foot. The bigger the lawn, the higher the rates. How big is your lawn?"

Wade blurted out the first numbers she could think of, not even conscious of what they were.

Lynch raised an eyebrow. "Really? Wow. That's the biggest one I've ever worked on."

"Steady, Miss Welles," Arturo murmured.

Lynch began to type on a calculator. "Okay, that's ten dollars a square foot, including equipment rental--"

Wade watched him work for a moment, and glanced up at Arturo. He only looked down at her with a dead expression. He left it up to her.

Wade took a deep breath. "So, these are some interesting tools you have."

Lynch glanced up at her, then back down at his work. "Yeah. You gotta have good equipment in this job."

"I'd have expected you to have fancier stuff. You know, electric trimmers, that sort of thing."

Lynch wrote something down. "I prefer manual. I can control it better, and I like working with my hands."

Wade gave Arturo a knowing look. His expression remained blank.

Wade wandered over to a hedge trimmer on one section of the wall. The blades were over a foot long. She tried to act casual as she leaned towards it. "So, whadda you think of the Golden Gate Killer?"

Lynch looked up at her, his pencil hovering over the page. "What do I think about it? I think it's pretty bad, I guess."

"You guess?"

Lynch looked back down at his notes. "Yeah. I mean, this world's full of crazies. Somebody's bound to snap every now and then. I hope they catch the guy."

Wade turned to look at him. "What do you think drives someone to do something like that? What motivates them."

Arturo turned a light shade of pink. Wade ignored him, focused on Lynch, who stared at her with a puzzled frown on his face.

"I dunno," Lynch said. "I never really thought about it before."

"Take a guess," Wade said.

Lynch put down his pencil and bit his lip in thought. "Well, I guess it's like a compulsion, you know? They just have to do it. Maybe...maybe they're okay for a while. You'd never know they were anything other than a normal person. But this desire, this bloodlust comes over them. And they have to kill. They *need* to kill. Just to feel something. Anything. Sometimes."

Lynch tore off the form he filled out, pinned it to a clipboard, and slid it towards her. "Sign here, please."

### PART THREE

Wade burst out of the shop by Arturo's side, barely able to contain herself. When they got onto the street that Wade thrust a fist into the air. "Yes! We got him! We got him on tape!"

"What are you talking about, Miss Welles?" Arturo asked.

Wade pulled the tape recorder out of her coat and thrust it into his face. "We got a confession. It's all here. All we need to do is send it to the police."

Arturo shook his head. "I would hardly call that a confession."

Wade's jaw hung open. "Oh, come on. All that stuff about wanting to feel something, a bloodlust. You telling me that didn't sound like the words of a killer?"

Arturo held out his hands again in a condescending gesture that really annoyed her. "All I am saying is that it would hardly hold up in court. You asked him a question. He answered it in a fairly insightful fashion. You cannot arrest someone for voicing an opinion."

Wade hurried to the cab idling at the curb. "Yeah, but with this, plus the knives and stuff in his shop, the cops would at least be pointed in the right direction."

She climbed in and leaned towards the driver. "Take us to the nearest police station, please."

Arturo climbed in. "Stop."

Wade glared at him. "What?"

"Remember our deal, Miss Welles," Arturo said. "We do not go to the police until we have solid, conclusive evidence. We cannot risk sending an innocent man to jail."

"Innocent? All right, fine." Wade shoved him out of the way, climbing over him to get out of the cab.

She walked briskly to a payphone. She flipped through a Yellow Pages bolted to it. When she found Lynch's name, Wade memorized the address, and headed back to the cab.

As she scooted into the backseat, Wade repeated the address, adding, "And step on it."

The driver nodded and sent the cab into traffic.

"Now where are we headed, Miss Welles?" Arturo asked.

The leather seat creaked underneath her as Wade settled back. "To Lynch's house."

"What?" Arturo yelled. "Are you insane?"

"Nope. You want proof? We'll get proof. And there's nowhere on Earth where there's more proof than in Lynch's own home."

Arturo threw up his hands as he slumped back in his seat. "This is ridiculous. I knew this excursion would get out of hand."

"Relax, professor. Everything's gonna be just fine." She hoped.

The house looked calmer than Wade expected, a two-story in a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. Children played football on the street as the taxicab pulled up in front of Lynch's house.

"Interesting neighborhood," Arturo said as he climbed out of the cab. "Calm, friendly. Not the domicile of a killer."

"Yeah," Wade murmured. "That's what they always say about serial killers. 'He was so nice, so normal, so good with kids.' Then whack-whack, he chops their heads off."

She headed up the sidewalk to the front walk of the house. The freshly-painted gate opened to a walk with smooth pavement and a neatly-trimmed lawn. An arrangement of flowers rested on the front



porch, casting a pleasant aroma into the air.

Wade stopped at the front door.

Arturo waited beside her, his hands clasped behind his back. "Well, Miss Welles? What is our next move in this little investigation?"

"We get in, we search the place, we get some evidence, and go to the police."

"And how do we do that?"

Wade pushed the doorbell. The pleasant chime rang through the house. "First, we make sure he's not home. Then, I pick the lock."

She got ready to get a couple of pins from her coat when a high voice emerged from inside the house.

"Just a minute," it said.

Wade froze. She looked at Arturo.

The front door clicked as locks disengaged. A woman opened the door, smiling at Wade and Arturo. She had a bowl of cake mix in one hand, and a wooden spoon in the other.

"Sorry," she said, "I'm baking. Can I help you with something?"

"Uh..." Wade looked up at Arturo, then back at the woman. She forced a smile. "Yeah, uh, hi. We're looking for Richard Lynch."

"I'm sorry, he's not home right now. But I'm his wife. Can I help you with something?"

Wade swallowed. She hadn't planned for this. "Uh, I think so. Um, actually, we'd like to talk to you. May we come in?"

Mrs. Lynch shrugged. "Sure, I guess. Come on."

She headed deeper into the house. Wade and Arturo held back, lingering in the doorway.

"You never told me he was married," Arturo whispered.

"He wasn't," Wade whispered back. "At least, not on the last world."

She headed deeper into the house, pleasantly decorated with an obvious woman's touch. The open drapes, allowed sunlight to fall into the living room. Wade thought she could detect the smell of potpourri and cookies, but none of the blood and rotting flesh she had expected.

Mrs. Lynch's voice emerged from the kitchen. "Make yourselves comfortable. I'll be out in a minute."

Wade sat down on the couch, sinking deep into the cushions. "Nice place."

Arturo took a seat next to her. "Yes, hardly what one would expect of a sociopath."

Wade bit her lip, struggling to think in the presence of the conflicting images in her mind. "Can a killer be married? I mean, can he be killing all these women and not be noticed by his own wife?"

"I'm not an expert on these matters." Arturo's eyes roamed the house. "I couldn't say. Are you having second thoughts, Miss Welles?"

"I guess I am. This isn't turning out the way I expected. Maybe Lynch isn't the killer, after all."

Mrs. Lynch stepped from the kitchen with a tray of sugar cookies. "I had some of these left over. Do you want some?"

"Uh, yes," Arturo said. "Thank you."

As he helped himself to some of the cookies, Mrs. Lynch sat down across from them. "So, are you friends of Richie?"

"No," Wade said. "Actually, we, um, can we ask you a few questions? About your husband?"

Mrs. Lynch crossed her legs. "Like what?"

"Has he been acting strange lately?"

Mrs. Lynch's smile flickered. "Strange? Like how?"

Wade gestured in the air, struggling to look casual. "Well, has he been doing anything unusual? Staying out late at night, doing odd things. I don't know. Just anything that makes you suspicious."

Mrs. Lynch's smile had collapsed into a firm line. "I don't know who you people are, but I'd like to know what you're implying."

Wade sighed. No point dancing around the issue. They didn't have time. "Okay, ma'am, we're concerned citizens who have reason to believe that your husband is the Golden Gate Killer."

Mrs. Lynch started to laugh, and then stopped. "Are...are you serious?"

"Quite," Arturo said. "Although, of course, we can't be absolutely sure."

Mrs. Lynch shook her head. "What makes you think my husband is a murderer?"

Wade winced. "It's, um...kind of complicated. But we would like to get your side of the story. Can you think of anything that might point in that direction?"

"No." Mrs. Lynch's mouth opened and closed a few times before saying, "Well, there is the basement."

Arturo stopped chewing. He spoke around the cookie in his mouth. "The basement?"

Mrs. Lynch rubbed her hands in a nervous gesture as she glanced into the hallway. "Yes. A few months ago, Richie gave me strict orders never to go into the basement. He said he was building something, a surprise for me. I started seeing him go in and out of there at all hours. Then the murders started."

"Can we see this basement?"

Mrs. Lynch pressed a hand against her cheek. "Oh, I don't know. I mean, he told me not to, and I always do what he says...but...I guess it couldn't hurt to look."

She stood up, smoothing down her dress. "Well, all right. Maybe just a peek. But there must be some misunderstanding."

Wade and Arturo stood to follow her into the hallway. Mrs. Lynch drew a keyring out of her apron and sifted through the keys until she selected one. She unlocked the door. She pulled it open, revealing it to be incredibly thick.

Wade reeled as a sickening stench blasted up from the open doorway, a mixture of rotting meat, burning metal, and other odors she didn't want to identify. Arturo and Mrs.

Lynch weren't immune to it, either. Mrs. Lynch clapped her hands over her mouth and nose while Arturo staggered back, coughing.

"What," Mrs. Lynch gasped. "is that smell?"

Arturo pulled out a handkerchief and pressed it over his face. "The smell of death, Mrs. Lynch."

He stepped into the darkness beyond, followed by Wade and Mrs. Lynch.

The staircase groaned beneath them as they descended it. The stench intensified as they went deeper into the shadowy cavern of the basement. The only light came from the open door behind them, and it faded as they moved into it. Arturo groped in the darkness until he found a cord for a lamp. He pulled it.

The lights came on, illuminating a slaughterhouse. Blood caked the floor in huge brown stains. A handmade wooden table supported a vast collection of knives, razors, hammers, pruning shears, and metal spikes. All arranged in careful rows, except for one stained with blood. A wooden chair served as the centerpiece for the basement, one fitted with straps for pinning down the arms and legs of anyone who sat in it. Padding on the walls and ceiling made it soundproof.

"Good lord," Arturo whispered.

Wade could only nod. The horror of what she saw almost overwhelmed, making her dizzy.

A muffled scream came from one of the padded walls.

Wade jumped down the staircase, trying to ignore the intense odors that filled the room. As she drew near to the wall, she realized a plank of wood rested across it to keep it closed. Wade knocked the wood aside to pull open the door.

Another, smaller room inside held a huddled woman in torn clothing. Deep cuts covered every inch of her body, some caked with dried blood. Rope bound her wrists and ankles. She screamed around a rag stuffed in her mouth.

"Oh, man." Wade leaned into the homemade cave to drag the woman out into the basement. She looked up at Mrs. Lynch and Arturo and began to scream louder.

Wade pressed a hand over her forehead, trying to cool her burning-hot skin. "It's okay. We're gonna get you out of here."

She began to work on the ropes around the woman's wrists. "Call the police. We've got Lynch right where we want him."

"Of course. Well done, Miss Welles." Arturo turned and hurried to the stairs. He froze. He began to back down it.

Richard Lynch took slow, measured steps down into the basement. His ice-blue eyes swept over the inside of the basement. His hands trembled against his sides.

His gaze fixed on his wife, and then on Wade. "What's going on here?"

Wade lunged towards the worktable. She grabbed the longest knife in the collection. She held the blade out at Lynch. "Stay back, you animal. Your sick games are over."

Lynch blinked. "What's happening down here? Helen?"

Mrs. Lynch glanced at Wade, and back at him. "I'm sorry, Richie. I had to let them down here. You need help."

"He doesn't need help," Wade said. "He needs to die. And you will, Lynch. We've got all the proof we need, including an eyewitness."

Wade yanked the rag out of the woman's mouth.

The woman screamed. "He's not the one! It's her! She's the Golden Gate Killer!"

## PART FOUR

Wade looked from the woman to Mrs. Lynch. "What?"

Mrs. Lynch grabbed a hammer off the worktable. She swung it at Arturo's head. Before Arturo could react, he had been knocked across the room. He slid to the floor, his eyes rolling up into his head.

Mrs. Lynch wheeled on Wade. She drew a butcher knife out of her apron. "Don't move."

Wade stared at her, her eyes wide in horror.

"Helen," Richard Lynch repeated. "What's going on here? What have you done?"

Wade backed away from Mrs. Lynch. "You didn't do this?"

"No," Lynch said. "She told me never to come down here. That she was making something for me, a surprise. But...this..."

"I did make something, honey," Mrs. Lynch said. "A big surprise. Your trip to the electric chair. Just one more woman to make an even fifty, then a tip-off to the police to put you on trial while I moved on somewhere else. To find another sucker to pin my work on."

Mrs. Lynch shrugged. "Oh, well. Best-laid plans, et cetera."

Lynch pointed a trembling finger at her. "You're the Golden Gate Killer? But how? Why?"

"Why?" Mrs. Lynch whispered. "Don't you remember that night we talked about the Killer? About the bloodlust that drives someone to kill? Didn't you make the connection then that I was talking about myself? The moment of death, when the blood is seeping from my prey, is the only time I feel...anything. I need to see blood, to feel it, to taste it."

"You're insane," Lynch whispered.

Mrs. Lynch smiled sweetly. "That's right, dear. And you're dead."

She threw the knife at Richard. It sank deep into his chest. Richard staggered back, gasped, and fell down the stairs. The thuds of his body striking the steps echoed through the basement. He landed at the foot of the staircase on his back, the knife protruding from his ribs. His breathing faded to a low whine.

Wade looked at Mrs. Lynch. She hunched over, breathing heavily. Her mouth hung open in a fierce smile. Her tongue came out to lick her upper lip. "Now it's your turn."

Mrs. Lynch threw herself at Wade, screaming. Wade remembered she held a knife. She brought it out to aim at the woman rushing towards her. But Mrs. Lynch seemed to dance out of the way of the blade. Her hand moved as a blur as it grabbed the handle in Wade's grip. It twisted, hard, causing a shock of pain in Wade's wrist. Wade gasped. She released the knife.

In a split-second, the knife had changed hands. It waited in Mrs. Lynch's hands now.

Mrs. Lynch grabbed Wade's shirt. She shoved Wade against the wall, pinning her there with a hand on her chest.

Mrs. Lynch raised the knife above her head. "Four in one day. That's a new record for me."

She raised the knife higher.

Mrs. Lynch froze. Her eyes widened. Her mouth opened wider, the smile melting into a grimace. A soft wheeze drifted out of her mouth. She fell over onto the floor.

A butcher knife jutted from her back.

Wade looked out to see Richard Lynch still lying at the foot of the stairs. The butcher knife no longer jutted from his chest. One hand clutched his bloody shirt. The other outstretched, lying on the floor, its last ounce of strength drained by the act of throwing the knife.

Wade swallowed, but her dry mouth caused her tongue to stick to the inside of her cheeks. She managed to speak. "Thank you."

Richard Lynch managed a weak smile. "You're welcome."

Circles of red and white light bathed over Wade from the lights of the police cars and ambulances. She watched as the paramedics loaded the captured woman and Richard Lynch into ambulances. A body bag carried Helen Lynch to the black van of the local morgue.

Arturo walked up to her, his head wrapped in snow-white bandages. He winced as he touched his temple. "I feel like my head has been used as a Ping-Pong ball."

Arturo shoved his hands in his pockets and sighed. "Well, I've called the others. They should be here in a few minutes. Easier to have them come to us. The police shall be detaining us for a while to take statements."

Wade nodded as she looked down at the sidewalk at her feet. She prodded a piece of used gum with her toe. "Professor? I just wanted to say I'm sorry. You were right. I was so convinced that everything would be the same here, that Lynch was the killer. I nearly got us killed."

Arturo shook his head, then winced in pain. "No, Miss Welles, I owe *you* an apology. You were right to interfere. If we had not attempted to solve this mystery, Richard Lynch would have been framed for the murders while his wife got away Scot-free. In this instance, our foreknowledge bore positive fruit."

"So I guess we were both wrong?"

Arturo shrugged, looking away into the distance. "There's no point in assigning blame. What's done is done. Soon, we'll be leaving all this behind us."

Wade watched the long, black plastic bag being loaded into the morgue van. "Not me, professor. I'll never be able to leave this behind."

The smell of death still lingered in her nostrils, carried into her lungs with every breath.

THE END

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