

AS HURRICANE KATRINA SPUN CLOSER TO THE GULF coast, Sienna realized Dominic's intent to ride out the storm, just as he had in all the other hurricanes. His decision was no marvel to her. He obviously considered himself invincible.

She peeked through the slightly ajar door to the attic stairway. He was, of course, too rich to have a standard pull-down ladder; no, Dominic Fontaine had to have a stairway to his attic.

Sounds of shattering glass came from the foyer. The formidable Katrina was hammering at the front of the mansion, morphing into a beast that clawed at the rafters, pounded at the flooring, and made promises to inflict still more. It was as if God Himself was behind the maelstrom. Sienna had never been in a hurricane, and anxiety crept into her mind. Was it always this bad? Was it only this frightening because she had never experienced it?

She had her own Katrina thumping against her chest cavity. Thrashing in the sea of her own trepidation, she tasted it in her mouth, then recognized it as meaningless. *I am going to die anyway.* He had made sure of that when he pushed

himself inside her and essentially mingled his diseased blood with her own. After all those years of being judicious. All those years when her party-happy friends were taking chances like a capricious vacation in Vegas, and prodding her mercilessly with monikers like Sainted Sienna, Sinless Sienna, Spotless Sienna, and even Snowy Sienna, to imply that she was frigid, rather than careful. Now, she felt the fear slipping away, replaced by her own resolve, her own fury; an apoplectic bitterness that was matched only by the tempest that pummeled the mansion of the man she despised.

Pleased to have placed herself correctly, she saw him hurrying up the staircase, silver briefcase in hand, dragging a yellow nylon rope. Pulling the door closed a bit, she observed him through the tiny crack as he lashed himself to the newel post at the top of the grand staircase that fed down into the foyer.

The compromised portions of the house were revealed with every slap of wind and rain. As the storm bullied on, moaning its feral incantation, the window beside the attic stairs blasted inward, shards of glass spattering to the hardwood floor, as Katrina sneezed into the opening.

Dominic held onto the rope with one hand, and the briefcase with the other, his own features touched by terror.

Shelving collapsed, and she heard more shattering glass downstairs. Pictures leaped from the walls along the stairs, their glass spitting out onto the steps. In the hall beyond the top of the grand staircase, Dominic's fish trophy plaques clattered to the floor. The gigantic swordfish rattled against the wall, as if preparing to reanimate and swim away in

the sodden air of Katrina.

She reached down to pick up the small bronze sculpture she had taken from the occasional table at the top of the stairs. Her fingers closed around it firmly, and she waited for the right moment to confront him. As water began to drip onto the landing from above, and a puddle grew near the ravaged window, she pushed the door open and stepped onto the landing.

Raising her voice above the din, she said smartly, "Well, Lincoln Berringer, as I live and breathe—"

He turned to the voice behind him, a moment of keen astonishment and recognition on his features, that had little to do with his joy at seeing her, and much to do with the realization that she knew who he was. His fate became clear, when he saw her holding the heavy statue, saw her raise it high.

He opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted by the moaning of Katrina, sucking the window frame from the wall. Debris struck her shoulder, and she fell to the slick floor, the statue toppling away. Steadying herself by holding the door knob of the attic stairs, keeping her head low against the incoming sheets of rain and wind and debris, she watched the giant swordfish drop to the floor, and move toward the hole where the window had been. A shifting of wind, and the monster fish spun, rolled, became airborne, and in mindless seconds, had impaled Dominic's back with its rapier beak. She captured the attic door jamb, to stop herself from being sucked toward the window.

Her attention back on him, the swordfish rocked back onto its tail, as Dominic leaned backward into it, soon limp. The briefcase toppled to the floor, as his arms spread open, his torso propped on the

swordfish, its beak protruding from his chest, his waist still secured to the newel post.

Stunned, she stared at him, splayed there like some fisherman's crucifixion. Euthanasia performed by God.

A blast of rain slapped the side of her face and she scrambled to the silver briefcase, which was already being sucked toward her on the sodden floor, snatched it up and ran down the hall to the bathroom, where she grabbed a rectangular wooden table, broke the legs off and huddled in the garden tub, holding the briefcase on her chest, the table over her head, waiting for the end of Katrina's blitzkrieg.