Invasion of Privacy
Deleted Scene Chapter 3
Jackpot

Outside the double doors, the swirling snow enveloped Nina's Bronco. Tossing her briefcase to the passenger side, she revved it up, flipped on the wipers, turned up the heat and her Pretenders tape and fled officialdom. She had to get away; too many people in there were anxious to give her a hard time. She needed a warm, cozy place to eat lunch alone, where no one would bother her.

She drove down Highway 50 into Nevada and turned into the Harvey's Club parking garage. Circling up, she parked at the third floor ramp which led directly inside. The concrete walls froze the air, though at least the wind could not enter.

Warmth. The big casino welcomed her with heat, din, bustle, brilliant light everywhere, gleaming banks of slot machines. On her right near glass doors, a huge Keno area welcomed senior citizens off a bus. They sat close together, comfortable as family at a cousin's house, drinking and marking their pads. No one glanced her way; she had entered a world as anonymous and post-modern as an international airport lobby.

The mountains and the lake made Tahoe magnificent, but the casinos made the town interesting. She loved watching the big players at the blackjack tables, loved hearing the shouts of the craps players and the jingling and ringing of the slots. It went on all day and all night. When the big storms of winter knocked out the power across town, the casinos fired up their auxiliary generators and the customers played on.

She would play a few quarters in the video poker machines. Then she would run in the coffee shop for a grilled cheese

sandwich and just have time to get back to court.

She watched a gray-haired woman use up the last quarters out of her paper cup and leave a warm stool in front of a likely-looking poker machine. Catching the change girl as she walked by, she gave her a twenty and received her two rolls. She cracked the first roll sharply against the chrome at the bottom of the slot and inserted her money.

On the first draw, she got a lousy pair of sixes. She had to draw at least a pair of Jacks to make her money back. Holding the sixes, she drew three cards. Hey! Another six! Jackpot! Twelve quarters! She popped in another quarter.

By twelve twenty, up seven bucks, with a second tomato juice under her belt, she felt warm and drowsy.

Staring at the hand displayed on her machine, four clubs and a heart, trying to decide whether to go for a flush or keep her pair, she realized she had to go. She didn't want to go. This business of playing gladiator for hire was rough. She touched her blouse, where the bullet had entered and she would always carry the scar. Getting shot had made her afraid of people. She had thought she was invulnerable, before.

The trouble was, a case was never just the intellectual exercise they taught you to handle in law school. Like Cervantes v. London. A film. An injunction. Case citations, dry declarations for the judge to read. Mental combat, scholarly and ceremonious. That was how she wanted to practice law.

In practice, almost every case brought out the ugly in people: emotions of hatred, revenge, rage, fear. The lawyers stayed above the roiling turmoil if they could, shuffled papers, followed rules, disguised little truths with big words. But since she had been shot, it was as if her heart listened acutely for all the whisperings she never used to hear.

Like this case. There was a rending, tearing black vampire somewhere in this case. Riesner was right about that, had picked the right image, because even though he was a 100% pure Florida slimebag, he was a good lawyer. Nina could feel some horror building up in that courtroom.

Or was her Irish imagination was working overtime again?

Face it, Nina, she said to herself, you don't want to go back right now. You want to play all afternoon, then check into a room on the seventh floor, take a hot bath and use the hotel's shampoo, and lie on a freshly made-up bed looking out the window toward the lights. Maybe some room service . . . cognac, perhaps? Cognac, definitely.

And lo, a large strong male would lounge on the bed beside her . . .Paul van Wagoner, she admitted to herself with a little shiver, and they would while the night away lost in passion . . .

She jogged out to the Bronco, skidded back down the road, let the wind slap her silly on the way in, stopped in the Women's to fix her face and slip on the heels . . .

And lo, under the fluorescents real life turned to look, and snarled from under the polite facades, as she made her way with all the dignity of an officer of the court to the cold hard chair at the front.

Terry London waited for her at the counsel table. "Show time," she said.