

Prologue

*Chicago,
Monday, December 29, 7:00 p.m.*

The sun had gone down. But then again, it tended to do that from time to time. He should get up and turn on a light.

But he liked the darkness. Liked the way it was quiet and still. The way it could hide a man. Inside and out. He was such a man. Hidden. Inside and out. All by himself.

He sat at his kitchen table, staring at the shiny new bullets he'd made. All by himself.

Moonlight cut through the curtains at the window, illuminating one side of the shiny stack. He picked up one of the bullets, held it up to the light, turned it side to side, round and round. Imagined the damage it would do.

His lips curved. Oh, yes. The damage *he* would do.

He squinted in the darkness, held the bullet up to the shaft of moonlight. Studied the mark his hand-crafted mold had pressed into the bullet's base, the two letters intertwined. It was his father's mark, and his father's before him. The symbol meant family.

Family. Carefully setting the bullet on the table, his fingers ran down the chain around his neck, feeling for the small medallion that was all that was left of his family. Of Leah.

The medallion had been hers, once a charm on her bracelet that had jingled with her every movement. Engraved with the letters in which she'd once based her faith.

He traced them, one by one. WWJD.

Indeed. What would Jesus do?

His breath caught, then released. Probably not what he was about to do.

Blindly he reached to his left, his fingers closing around the edge of the picture frame. He closed his eyes, unable to look at the face behind the glass, then opened them quickly,

the more recent picture in his mind too agonizing to bear. He never believed his heart could break yet again, but every time he gazed into her eyes, frozen forever on film, he realized he'd been wrong. A heart could break again and again and again.

And a mind could replay pictures hideous enough to drive a man insane. Again and again and again.

With his left hand he measured the weight of her picture in its cheap silver frame against the flimsy weight of the medallion he held in his right.

Was he insane? Did it matter if he was?

He vividly remembered the sight of the coroner pulling back the sheet that covered her. The coroner had decided the sight was too gruesome to be done in person, so the identification had been done by closed circuit video. He vividly remembered the look on the face of the sheriff's deputy as her body was revealed. It was pity. It was revulsion.

He couldn't say he blamed him. It wasn't every day that a small-town sheriff's office discovered the remains of a woman intent on ending her life. And ended it she had. No pills or slit wrists. No veiled cries for help from his Leah. No. She'd ended it with determination.

She'd ended it with the business end of a .38 against her temple.

His lips curved humorlessly. She'd ended it like a man. So like a man he'd stood, nodded. But the voice from his throat was that of a stranger. "Yes, that's her. That's Leah."

The coroner had nodded once, acknowledging he'd heard. Then the sheet went back up and she was gone.

Yes, a heart could break again and again and again.

Gently he set the frame back on the table and picked up the bullet, one thumb stroking the pressed mark that had belonged to his father, the other the mark that had been Leah's.

WWJD. So what *would* Jesus do?

He still didn't know. But he *did* know what He *wouldn't* do.

He wouldn't have allowed a twice-convicted rapist to roam the streets preying on innocent women. He wouldn't have allowed the monster to rape again. He wouldn't have allowed his victim to become so wretchedly depressed that she saw taking her own life as her only escape. He certainly wouldn't have allowed that rapist to escape justice a third time.

He'd prayed for wisdom, searched the Scripture. *Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord*, he'd read. God would have the final justice.

He swallowed hard, feeling Leah stare at him from the picture frame.

He'd just help God grant His final justice just a little bit sooner.

Chapter One

*Chicago,
Wednesday, February 18, 2:00 p.m.*

"You've got company, Kristen." Owen Madden pointed toward the window to the street where a man stood in a heavy winter coat, his head tilted in question.

Kristen Mayhew gave him a brief nod and he entered the diner where she'd escaped the enraged protests inside the courtroom and the barrage of questions from the press outside its doors. She stared into her soup as her boss, Executive Assistant States Attorney John Alden sat on the stool beside her. "Coffee, please," he said and Owen got him a cup.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked, very quietly.

"Lois told me that this is where you come for lunch."

And breakfast and dinner, too, Kristen thought. If it didn't come in a microwavable carton, it came from Owen's. John's secretary knew her habits well.

"The local station interrupted programming for the verdict and reaction," John said. "But you held your own with the press. Even that Richardson woman."

Kristen bit the inside of her cheek, anger roiling at the memory of the platinum blonde's microphone in her face. She'd so wanted to shove that microphone up Zoe Richardson's ... "She wanted to know if there would be 'repercussions' in your office because of this loss."

"You know this is not a performance issue. You've got the best conviction record in the office." John shivered. "Damn, I'm cold. You want to tell me what happened in there?"

Kristen pulled the pins from the twist that held her hair in severe check, a raging headache the price of curl control. There was enough compressed energy in her bobby pins to fuel downtown Chicago for a year. Her hair sprung free and she knew she was now Little

Orphan Annie. With eyes. And no dog named Sandy. And certainly no Daddy Warbucks watching over her. Kristen was on her own.

She massaged her head wearily. "They hung. Eleven guilty, one innocent. Juror three. Bought lock, stock, barrel and soul by the money of *wealthy industrialist, Jacob Conti*." She sing-songed the last, the press's description of Angelo Conti's father. The man she knew had corrupted the system and denied a grieving family justice.

John's eyes darkened abruptly and his jaw tightened. "You're sure?"

She remembered the way the man who sat in chair number three wouldn't meet her eyes when the jury filed back in after four days of deliberations. How the other jury members looked at him with such contempt. "Sure I'm sure. He's got a young family, lots of bills. He's a prime target for a man like Jacob Conti. We all knew Conti was prepared to do anything to get his son off. Can I prove Juror Three took money from Conti in exchange for a hung jury?" She shook her head. "No, I can't."

John's fist clenched on the countertop. "So we've basically got nothing."

Kristen shrugged. Exhaustion was beginning to set in. One too many sleepless nights before the culmination of a critical trial. And she knew she wouldn't sleep tonight either. She knew that as soon as she laid her head on her pillow she'd hear the tortured cries of Paula Garcia's young husband as the jury disbanded and Jacob Conti's son walked away a free man. At least until they could try him again. "I'll get started tracking Juror Three's spending habits. Sooner or later he'll spend the money to pay off his bills. It's just a matter of time."

"And in the meantime?"

"I'll start a new trial. Angelo Conti will go back to Northwestern and resume his drinking and Thomas Garcia will go back to his empty apartment and stare at an empty crib."

John sighed. "You did your best, Kristen. Sometimes that's all we can do. If only ..."

"If only he'd wrapped his Mercedes around a tree and not Paula Garcia," Kristen said

bitterly. "If only he hadn't been so drunk that beating Paula Garcia to death with a tire iron to keep her quiet seemed like a good idea." She was shaking now, a combination of exhaustion and grief for the woman and the unborn child that had died with her. "If only Jacob Conti was more concerned about teaching his son responsibility than keeping him out of prison."

"If only Jacob Conti had taught his son responsibility *before* giving him the keys to a hundred-thousand dollar sports car. Kristen, go home. You look like shit."

Her laugh was wobbly. "You sure know how to charm a girl."

He didn't smile back. "I'm serious. You look like you're about to drop right off your feet. I need you back here tomorrow ready to go again."

She glanced up, her mouth bent in a wry grimace. "You sweet-talker, you."

He did smile at that, briefly. Then he was sober once again. "I want Conti, Kristen. He's corrupted the system, tainted the jury pool. I want him to pay."

Kristen forced her body to slide off the stool, forced her legs to hold her up, fighting gravity and exhaustion. She met John's eyes with grim determination. "No more than I do."

Wednesday, February 18, 6:45 p.m.

Abe Reagan walked through the maze of detectives' desks, well aware of the curious stares that followed him he searched for Lieutenant Marc Spinnelli. His new CO.

He heard the conversation inside when he was three feet from Spinnelli's cracked-open door. "Why him?" a female voice demanded. "Why not Wellinski or Murphy? Dammit, Marc, I want a partner I can *trust*, not some new guy nobody knows about."

Abe waited for Spinnelli's response. He had no doubt the woman was his new partner and based on her recent loss, he couldn't say he blamed Mia Mitchell for her attitude.

"You don't want a new partner at all, Mia," came the level answer and Abe figured that was true enough. "But you're going to have a partner," Spinnelli continued, "and since last I

looked I was your superior officer, I get to pick who that partner is."

"But he's never done Homicide. I gotta have someone with some experience here."

"He's got experience, Mia." Spinnelli's voice was soothing without being condescending. Abe liked that. "He's been undercover in Narcotics for the last five years."

Five years. He'd gone under a year after Debra was shot, hoping the added risk would dull the pain of watching his wife exist in the life-support induced limbo doctors called a persistent vegetative state. It hadn't. A year ago she'd died and he stayed with his cover, hoping the risk would dull the pain of losing her completely. That it had done.

Mitchell was silent and Abe had started to knock when Spinnelli's voice cut through once again, this time reproachful. "Did you read any of the information I gave you?"

Another half-beat of silence, followed by Mitchell's defensive answer. "I didn't have time. I was making sure Cindy and the kids had food on the table."

Cindy would be Mrs. Ray Rawlston, the widow of Mitchell's former partner who'd been killed in an ambush that left Mitchell with a scar just above her ribs where a bullet narrowly missed every major organ. It would appear Mitchell was a lucky cop. It would also appear that Abe knew a lot more about her than she knew about him. No longer compelled to eavesdrop, he lifted his knuckles to the door in a hard knock.

"Come." Spinnelli sat behind his desk and Mitchell leaned against a wall, arms crossed over her chest, eyeing him sharply. At five-four, her one hundred twenty-five pounds was a well-distributed muscled mass. Her file said she was single, never been married, thirty-one years old. Her face looked a good deal younger. Her eyes, on the other hand ... She might as well have been coming up for her retirement Timex. Abe knew the feeling.

Spinnelli stood, his hand extended in greeting. "Abe, so good to see you again."

Abe met Spinnelli's eyes briefly as he shook his hand, but quickly resumed his study of his new partner. Her eyes met his even though she had to bend her neck to look up. She

didn't blink as she continued to lean against the wall, every muscle visibly tensed.

"Good to see you, too, Lieutenant." He returned her stare. "You're Mitchell."

She nodded coolly. "Last I checked, that was the name on my locker."

Well, at least this won't be boring, he thought. He stuck his hand out. "Abe Reagan."

She shook his hand fast, as if sustaining physical contact was a painful thing. Maybe it was. "I figured that out myself." She shot him a hostile look. "Why'd you leave Narcotics?"

"Mia!"

Abe shook his head. "It's okay. I can give Detective Mitchell the Reader's Digest version since she's been too busy to read my file." Mitchell's eyes narrowed but she said nothing. "We closed a five-year sting operation, nabbing the bad guys and fifty million in pure heroine, but my cover was blown in the process." He shrugged. "Time to move on."

Her stare never wavered. "Okay, Reagan, you made your point. When do you start?"

"Today," Spinnelli said. "Everything finished up in Narcotics, Abe?"

"Almost. I have to tie up a few loose ends at the prosecutors' office, so I'll head over there when we're done." His grin was rueful. "I've been under so long, it'll be an adjustment, walking in the front door of the SA's office, introducing myself as a detective again." Abe sobered. "Do I get a desk?" he asked and saw the pain that flashed in Mitchell's eyes.

She swallowed hard. "Yeah. I still have to clean it out, but --"

"It's okay," Abe interrupted. "I can do that."

Mitchell shook her head hard. "No," she bit out. "I'll do it. Go tie up your loose ends. The desk will be yours when you get back." Turning on her heel, she headed for the door.

Spinnelli faltered. "Mia ..."

She spun around, rage supplanting the pain. "I said *I'd do it*, Marc." She was breathing hard as she fought for control.

"Did they, Mitchell?" Abe asked softly.

Her eyes flew up to meet his. "Did they what?"

"Did Ray's wife and kids have food on the table?"

Her breath shuddered out. "Yeah. They did."

"Good." Abe saw he'd scored a point with his new partner. Her nod of response was jerky, but she was back in enough control that she didn't slam the door behind her. Still, the blinds on the window clattered and shook.

Spinnelli drew a breath. "She's not over him yet. He was her mentor." Spinnelli shrugged and Abe could see he still had unresolved grief of his own. "He was her friend."

"Yours, too."

Spinnelli managed a smile before sinking back down into the chair behind his desk. "Mine, too. Mia's a good cop." His eyes sharpened and Abe had the sudden, uncomfortable feeling Spinnelli was looking straight into his own soul. "I think you'll be good for each other."

Abe was the first to look away. He jangled his car keys. "I need to be getting over to the prosecutor's office." He'd made it to the door before Spinnelli stopped him again.

"Abe, I *have* read your file. You were lucky to be alive at the end of that last sting."

Abe shrugged. It was the story of his sorry life. Lucky, lucky, lucky. If they only knew the truth. "Looks like Mitchell and I have something in common after all."

Spinnelli's jaw tightened. "Mia went down guarding Ray's back. You have the reputation of taking chances, riding in to save the day." Spinnelli's expression was severe.

"Leave your death wish in Narcotics. I don't want to go to any more funerals. Yours or Mia's."

Easier said than done. But knowing what was expected, Abe nodded stiffly. "Yes, sir."

Chapter Two

Wednesday, February 18, 8:00 p.m.

Kristen jabbed the elevator button. She was late leaving the office *again*. "Go home and rest, my ass," she muttered. John wanted her fresh for tomorrow, but he'd also wanted a 'quick check' on a case. One thing led to another, just like every night. And just like every night she walked out of the office after everyone else had gone home, including John. She rolled her eyes even as she noted the burned out bulbs in the hallway that connected their offices to the parking garage elevators. She fished her dictating recorder from her pocket.

"Note to Maintenance," she murmured into the recorder. "Two bulbs burned out at elevator entrance." Hopefully Lois would type up that note and the twenty others she'd recorded in the last three hours. Lois never refused, it was just a matter of getting her attention. All the prosecutors had staggering caseloads and every request coming out of the Special Investigations Unit was life and death. Unfortunately, Kristen's case load was mostly death. Which ended up taking most of her life. Not that she had much of one. Here she was, standing here at the elevator to the parking garage, alone and almost too tired to care.

She let her head drop forward, stretching muscles strained from poring over case files when the hairs on the back of her neck lifted and her nose detected a slight shift in the musty smell of the hallway. *Tired, yes, but not alone. Someone else is here.* Instinct, training and old tapes had her reaching for the pepper spray she kept in her purse while her pulse scrambled and her brain strained to remember the location of the nearest exit. Every movement deliberate, she spun, her weight evenly distributed on the balls of her feet, the can of pepper spray clenched in her fist. Prepared to flee, but ready to defend.

She had but a split second to process the sight of the mountain of a man that stood

behind her, his arms crossed over his broad chest, his eyes glued to the digital display above the elevator doors before one of his huge hands was clamped around her wrist in a vise grip and his eyes were boring into hers.

Blue eyes, bright as a flame, yet cold as ice. They held her gaze inexplicably. Kristen shivered yet still she stared, unable to look away. There was something familiar about his eyes. But the rest of him was a total stranger, and the rest of him filled the hallway, his broad shoulders blocking what little light there was, throwing his face into shadow. She searched her memory, trying to place where she'd seen him. Surely she'd remember a man of his size and presence. Even wrapped in shadow, the hard planes of his face spoke of unmistakable desolation, the line of his jaw uncompromising strength. Each day she dealt with people in pain and suffering, and intuitively she knew this man had experienced a great deal of both.

It was another second before she realized he was breathing as rapidly as she was. With a muttered curse he ripped the pepper spray out of her hand and the spell was broken. He dropped her wrist and automatically she rubbed it, her heart slowing to a somewhat normal rate. He hadn't been rough, just firm. Still, she'd have bruises from the pressure of his fingers on her skin even through the layers of her winter coat.

"Are you insane, lady?" he snarled softly, his voice a deep rumble in his chest.

Her temper rallied. "Are you? Don't you know better than to sneak up on women in dark hallways? I could have hurt you."

One dark eyebrow quirked up, amused. "Then you *are* insane. If I'd been bent on assaulting you, there wouldn't have been a damn thing you could've done to stop me."

Kristen felt the blood drain from her face as his words hit home and just that fast all the old tapes began to roll. He was right. She would have been defenseless, at his mercy.

His eyes narrowed. "Don't faint on me, lady."

Again her temper surged, saving her. She pulled herself upright. "I never faint." That

much was true. She extended her hand, palm up. "My pepper spray, if you don't mind."

He grunted. "I do mind." But he dropped it in her palm anyway. "I'm serious, lady, that pepper spray would just have made me madder. Especially since you didn't get me right away. I might even have used it on you."

Kristen frowned. Knowing he was right just made her madder. "What do you expect a woman to do?" she snapped, exhaustion making her rude. "Just stand here and be a victim?"

"I never said that." He shrugged. "Take a self-defense class."

"I have." The elevator dinged and both of them jerked their eyes to the wall, waiting to see which set of doors would open first. The doors on the left slid open and the man waved his hand dramatically, gesturing her in first.

She assessed him with a shrewdness born of thousands of hours of associating with known felons who'd committed every unspeakable crime. This man was no danger, she could see that now. Still, Kristen Mayhew was a prudent woman. "I'll wait for the next one."

His blue eyes flashed. His square jaw clenched and a muscle twitched in his cheek. She'd offended him. Too damn bad. "I don't hurt innocent women," he said tightly, holding the elevator doors back when they began to close. His powerful body settled slightly and she got the sudden impression he was as weary as she. "Come on, lady, I don't want to hold this elevator all damn night, and I won't leave you here all alone."

Uneasily she glanced up and down the deserted hallway. She didn't like loitering there any longer than she had to. So she walked into the elevator, annoyed as always when faced with the reality that despite ten years and five times as many self-therapy books, she was still afraid to be alone in a dark corridor. "Don't call me 'lady'," she snapped.

He followed her in and the doors slid closed. He faced her, his eyes now stern. "What was the first thing they taught you in that self-defense class, *ma'am*?"

She seethed under his patronizing tone. "To always be aware of your surroundings."

He simply lifted an arrogant brow and Kristen's blood began to boil. "I was. I knew you were there, didn't I? Even though you snuck up on me." And he had. She swore he had not been there a moment before she sensed him and he hadn't made a sound in his approach.

He snorted. "I'd been standing there for two whole minutes."

Kristen narrowed her eyes. "I don't believe you."

He leaned back against the elevator wall, folding his arms across his chest. "'Note to Maintenance'," he mimicked. "And my personal favorite, 'Go home and rest, my ass'."

Kristen felt her face flood with color. "Why haven't we moved?" she demanded, then rolled her eyes. Neither of them had punched a button. Quickly she jabbed the button for the second floor and the elevator began to move.

"And now I know where you've parked your car," he announced with a satisfied nod.

He was right. She'd ignored everything she'd learned about keeping herself safe. She rubbed her throbbing temples. "You were right, I was wrong. Are you satisfied now, sir?"

His lips curved at that and the sight took her breath away. A simple smile transformed his face from devastating to ... devastating. Her poor, abused heart skipped a beat and she had the good sense to be surprised at herself. She didn't react to men, not *that* way, anyway. It wasn't that she didn't like them or notice them or even appreciate a good specimen here or there. And he was most definitely a good specimen. Tall, broad. Movie-star good looks. Of course she'd noticed him. She was human after all. Just slightly broken. The memory of a single word cut into her consciousness. No, there was no 'slightly' about it.

"No, ma'am," he said. "And I honestly didn't mean to sneak up on you. You just seemed so pleasantly engaged in conversation with yourself and I didn't want to barge in."

Again her cheeks burned. "Don't you ever talk to yourself?"

His smile dimmed and the look of almost desperate desolation returned to his eyes making Kristen feel guilty for even asking the question. "On occasion," he murmured.

The elevator dinged again and the doors opened to a darkened cavern of automobiles and the smell of stale oil and exhaust. This time his 'after you' gesture was much more subdued and Kristen wasn't sure how to end the conversation.

"Look, I'm sorry I almost pepper sprayed you. You were right. I should have been more aware of my surroundings."

He studied her carefully. "You're tired. People lower their guard when they're tired."

She smiled wryly. "So it shows, huh?"

He nodded. "Yeah. Just for my peace of mind, let me walk you to your car."

Kristen narrowed her eyes. "Who are you?"

"I was wondering when you'd ask. Are you always this trusting, carrying on conversations with strange men in deserted elevators?"

No, she definitely wasn't, definitely had right not to be. "No, I normally pepper spray first and ask questions later," she shot back and he smiled, this time in rueful acceptance.

"Then I guess I'm lucky once again," he said. "I'm Abe Reagan."

Kristen frowned. "I know you. I know I do."

He shook his dark head. "No, I would have remembered you."

"Why?"

"Because I never forget a face."

He said it matter-of-factly, as if there were no possibility of flirtation. And Kristen was annoyed to find herself disappointed.

"I have to be getting home." She turned on her heel, her key poking out from between two fingers as she'd been taught. She held her head high and looked and listened as she walked, but only heard his footsteps behind her. She stopped at her aged Toyota and he stopped, too. She looked up at his face, again in the shadows. "Thank you. You can go now."

"I don't think so, *ma'am*."

Enough was enough. "Excuse me?"

He pointed to her tire. "See for yourself."

Kristen looked and felt physically sick. Of all times, a flat tire. "Dammit."

"Don't worry, I'll change it for you."

Another day she might have refused, because she was certainly capable of changing a tire. Today, she'd let him knock himself out. "Thanks. I really appreciate it, Mr. Reagan."

He took off his overcoat and laid it across her hood. "My friends call me Abe."

She hesitated, then shrugged. If he'd planned anything evil, he would have done it by now. "I'm Kristen."

"Then pop the trunk, Kristen, and we'll have you on your way."

Kristen did, wondering when she'd last opened her trunk, sincerely hoping she had a spare, already anticipating Mr. Know-it-all's scathing response if she didn't.

And stopped short, staring at the interior of the trunk she'd left clean and empty.

To say it wasn't as she'd left it would be quite the understatement. She reached out a tentative hand, then snatched it back. *Don't touch anything.* She squinted, trying to make sense of the three large shapes that had not been there before. As her eyes grew accustomed to the dim illumination provided by the little trunk light, her brain began to process what her eyes were seeing. And the resulting message from her brain sent her stomach churning. She'd thought her day couldn't get any worse after the Conti mistrial.

She'd been very, very wrong.

Reagan's voice cut through the fog in her brain. "This should only take a few minutes."

"Um, I don't think so."

In an instant he was behind her, looking over her shoulder and she could hear him exhale on a hiss. "Holy shit."

Either his eyes were better than hers or fatigue had put her in slow-motion mode

because it had taken Abe Reagan only a split second to comprehend what had taken her multiple seconds to process to the point of being well and truly horrified.

"I need to call the police." Her voice trembled and she didn't care. It wasn't every day her personal space was violated. It sure as hell wasn't every day she presided over her very own crime scene. And this one qualified as a real doozy.

Three plastic milk crates sat side by side. Each contained clothing topped by a manila envelope. Each envelope had a single Polaroid taped precisely in its center. And even from where she stood she could see the subject of each Polaroid was well and truly dead.

"I need to call the police," she repeated, grateful her voice was steady once again.

"You just did," Abe replied, his voice grim.

Kristen twisted, looking up at his face. "You're a cop?"

He pulled a pair of latex gloves from his pocket. "Detective Abe Reagan, Homicide." The gloves went on each hand with a surgical snapping sound that seemed to echo in the quiet of the garage. "This might be a good time to completely introduce yourself, Kristen."

He carefully pulled the envelope from the crate on the far right. "Kristen Mayhew."

His head jerked around, surprise on his face. "The prosecutor? Well, I'll be damned," he added when she nodded. He studied her face intently. "It's your hair," he announced and turned his attention back to the envelope in his hand.

"What about my hair?"

"It was pulled back." He held the envelope close to the trunk light. "I wish I had a flashlight."

"I have one in the glove box."

He shook his head, his eyes fixed on the Polaroid. "Don't bother. I'll have your car towed and dusted for prints, so don't touch anything. Sonofagun. This boy is dead."

"What, the bullet hole in his head tipped you off?" Kristen asked wryly and Abe

Reagan shot her a brief but equally wry grin.

"Hey, what can I say?" Then he sobered, resuming his study. "Caucasian male, late twenties, early thirties. Hands tied in front of him..." He squinted. "Wonderful," he said flatly.

Kristen leaned over his arm to stare. "What?"

"If I'm not mistaken, somebody's stitched your boy up, stem to stern."

Kristen grabbed his arm and tilted the picture towards the trunk light. Sure enough, a line started at the man's sternum and stretched down his torso. "My God," she murmured. Horrified by a sudden thought her eyes flicked to the milk crates, then up to meet Reagan's eyes. "You don't think..." She let the question trail off when his face twisted into a grimace.

"What, that whatever body parts that were removed are in these crates? Well, Counselor, I suppose we'll find out soon enough. Do you recognize this guy?"

She squinted, shook her head. "It's too dark. Maybe I will when we get it in better light." She looked up at him, feeling stupid and helpless and hating both. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay, Kristen. We'll figure this out." He flipped his cell phone open and punched some numbers. "It's Reagan," he announced. "I've got a ... "

"Situation," Kristen supplied, feeling hysterical laughter building down deep. She shoved it deeper. Someone had committed murder and stowed the evidence in the *trunk* of her *car*. There could be hearts and spleens and God-knew-what-else in the *trunk* of her *car*. She'd been driving around, blissfully unaware that an entire crime scene resided in the damn *trunk* of her *car*. She took a deep breath, relieved to smell stale oil and exhaust instead of putrid rotting internal organs.

"A situation," Abe was repeating. "I'm here with Kristen Mayhew. Someone left what looks like evidence of a multiple homicide in the trunk of her car ... We're on the second floor of the parking garage next door to the courthouse. Seal the exits, just in case he's still around." He listened, then looked down at her, and his eyes which she'd thought to be cold

flared to life with heated interest. His eyes slid to her hands which she realized were still clutching his arm as if he were a lifeline. Quickly she stepped back and looked away, dropping her hands to her sides just as he said, "I'll tell her...Yeah, I'll be waiting." He snapped his phone shut and dropped it in his pocket. "You okay?" he asked.

She nodded, hoping her face was only peony pink and hadn't progressed to ruby red which clashed with her hair. Striving for dignity, she asked, "Tell me what?" Then she looked up and whatever forced nonchalance she'd managed to work into her face just drained away.

He was still looking at her, his eyes intense, his jaw tight. A tingle started in her chest and sped to her extremities making her shiver and to her mortification she had to clench her hands to keep them from grabbing his arm again. "Spinnelli says to tell you that you didn't have to go to so much trouble for department attention," he said, his voice low and rumble. "Flowers and candy would have sufficed." The timbre of his voice alone intensified the sensation of fingertips trailing the back of her neck and she suddenly wondered what it would be like if he did just that. But he'd turned back to her trunk and the other two crates, breaking the almost tangible connection between them and Kristen shivered again. "He's sending a CSU team. This could take a while."

Wednesday, February 18, 9:00 p.m.

Finally. He sat in his car safely out of the flurry of uniformed activity taking place inside the parking garage. Lights flashed and yellow tape was strung everywhere. Either some political dignitary had been murdered in the garage or Kristen Mayhew had finally looked in her trunk. He was pretty certain he could disregard the former.

He'd been busy in the last weeks. He was up to six. Six down, about a million to go.

He'd taken his first in secret, painlessly and quietly.

And had discovered it wasn't nearly enough. Not enough that he'd done such a thing

for the world. For the victims. For his Leah. It wasn't enough that he be the only one to know. It wasn't enough that he be the only one to celebrate.

So he'd abruptly changed his plan and once done, it was easy to determine who else would know what he'd done. The person who most deserved to know.

Kristen Mayhew.

He'd been watching her for some time. Knew how vigilantly she worked to get justice for every victim that crossed her path. And how destroyed she was every time she failed. Today had been a bad one. Angelo Conti. Vicious, vicious, cold-hearted bastard.

His hands clenched around the steering wheel. Conti had murdered a pregnant woman with no remorse, but was home tonight, sleeping in his own soft bed. Conti would wake up tomorrow and go on with his life.

He smiled. He himself would wake up tomorrow and add Conti's name to the fishbowl. It was full, his fishbowl. Full of slips of paper, cut precisely, folded precisely. Each holding a typed name, representing so much evil. But they would get their due, one at a time. He'd get to Conti sooner or later. And like all the others, Conti would pay.

He was up to six. Six down, about a million to go.