

Dead & Buried

T.K. Eldridge



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Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Also by T.K. Eldridge](#)

[Prologue](#)

[1. Chapter One](#)

[2. Chapter Two](#)

[3. Chapter Three](#)

[4. Chapter Four](#)

[5. Chapter Five](#)

[6. Chapter Six](#)

[7. Chapter Seven](#)

[8. Chapter Eight](#)

[9. Chapter Nine](#)

[10. Chapter Ten](#)

[11. Chapter Eleven](#)

[12. Chapter Twelve](#)

[13. Chapter Thirteen](#)

[14. Chapter Fourteen](#)

[15. Chapter Fifteen](#)

[16. Chapter Sixteen](#)

[17. Chapter Seventeen](#)

[18. Chapter Eighteen](#)

[19. Chapter Nineteen](#)

[20. Chapter Twenty](#)

[21. Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[22. Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[23. Preview of Dead Wrong](#)

[About the Author](#)

*To all of those men and women who serve the public at large -
from grocery clerks to doctors and everyone in between.
Thank you for your service and your sacrifice.*

“I’ve learned that people will forget what
you said, people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made
them feel.” — Maya Angelou

Also by T.K. Eldridge

This is the first book in the Partners in Crime Supernatural Mysteries series.

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Prologue

Being ignored or shunned was not something they were used to. Doting parents, sycophant friends, they all hung on their every word. The best schools, the best clothes, the best trainers, no expense had been spared. When someone grows up with every wish granted, every desire fulfilled, what more could they strive towards?

Oh, they knew they should be grateful. Charitable, even. Instead, they had decided that it was time to take the next step. No more being under parental control, no more answering to every demand of mother or father – it was time to show them just what they'd created.

Thumbs danced across the screen, and the text was sent. A reply came back moments later. “*Target acquired.*”

One by one, they'd all come tumbling down. It was only fair. What else was a person supposed to do for family, if not take up their battles when they could no longer fight?

Chapter One

Jameson Kennedy made his way around the tangled crowd of vehicles and people. A flash of his badge and he ducked under the yellow tape, steeling himself for the sight of yet another body. The sideways looks he was getting from the other cops and techs made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Donovan had been his partner for all eight years of his detective career. They knew each other's families, their kids went to school together, his ex-wife and Donovan's wife were friends – they were as close as brothers. If this really was Donovan lying in the mud at the side of the road, he had to keep it together. He couldn't break down in front of everyone.

Finally the last row of people parted, and he stepped close enough to see the body.

He couldn't stop the hard intake of breath. It felt like someone had just punched him in the chest. Mud splattered the sweatshirt and jeans of the figure before him, but he recognized the college logo and the splash of green paint he'd put on the faded blue cloth just last week. The face was mud-splattered, battered and bloody, but he knew it well. He tried to speak, but his voice cracked, so he cleared his throat and said, "Yes, that is Michael Donovan."

“Positive identification made of the victim as Michael Donovan, detective second grade, Harbor PD,” the coroner said as he moved back to allow his assistants to finish bagging Donovan’s hands and putting his body into the bag.

“Sorry for your loss, Kennedy,” Dr. Finney said as he passed him.

Crime makes a mark. It leaves a scar that resonates in the atmosphere of the place where it happened. Jameson Kennedy knew he would never pass this place again without feeling the pain of Donovan’s loss.

“I want to do the notification,” Kennedy said.

“Take Edgars with you,” Sergeant Simmons replied.

“Whatever,” Kennedy muttered as he headed back to his car.

Jerry Edgars, new to the squad, was standing beside the car when Kennedy got there.

“Sarge called you?” Kennedy asked.

“Yes, sir. I’m sorry for your loss,” Edgars replied.

“Just stay quiet and get in. I know Katherine Donovan, so let me talk, okay?”

“Understood.”

They were both silent as Kennedy drove them the half mile to Donovan’s house and pulled up out front.

“I don’t suppose you’d stay in the car?” Kennedy asked Edgars.

“Sarge said I was to stay with you as a witness in case she said something,” Edgars replied.

Rage surged, but he swallowed it down. The knee-jerk reaction to protect his partner and his partner’s family had to be kept in check. He had to behave as if this were any other notification for any other case. Silence seemed his best choice, so Kennedy gave Edgars a nod and got out of the car.

He walked across the grass front lawn and up to the door. The simple brick two-story with a front porch that wrapped around one side and a fenced-in backyard

was just like any other suburban home. He knocked on the door and waited as Katie opened it and gave him a smile.

“Hey, Jamie. Mike went to the store, but he should be back any minute,” Katie said. “Want to come in for a coffee?”

“Hi, Katie. This is Detective Edgars. We need to speak with you. The kids at school?” Kennedy said.

“Jamie, what’s wrong? Yes, the kids are at school.”

Jamie took her hands in his and looked her in the eyes. “Katie, I just came from a crime scene. Someone killed Mike.”

“No, he’s just at the store. He called and asked if the store brand was fine. He should be home any moment.”

“I had to identify his body, Katie.”

That’s when she started to sob and leaned into Kennedy’s chest. He walked her over to the couch and sat her down, still holding her for the moment. “Let me call Elise to come be with you, okay? She can get the kids and come be here.”

Katie nodded and sniffled, then got to her feet. “Tissues. I’ll be right back.”

They watched her go into the half-bath under the stairs, heard the water turn on, then they heard a howl of such pain it caused both men to flinch. Edgars took a step towards the sound and Kennedy shook his head. “Let her get it out and pull herself together. She’s been a cop’s wife for fifteen years, she’ll be okay. I need to call my ex.”

Kennedy pulled out his phone and hit the button to dial.

“I don’t need your shit right now, Jamie,” the voice said, and Kennedy sighed.

“Elise, I’m calling for Katie. Mike was killed, and I identified his body about half an hour ago. Can you get her kids at school and come be with her? She’s going to need you.”

“Oh, fuck,” Elise said. *“I’ll get them and be there in thirty minutes. Are you staying with her until I get there?”*

“I’m not leaving her alone. Edgars and I are here right now.”

“*On my way,*” and the call disconnected.

Elise arrived, then more family, and Kennedy felt like he couldn’t breathe. Edgars gave him a good excuse to leave, so he bailed on his friend’s family. He dropped Edgars at the station without getting out of his car, then headed home.

Jameson’s bare little apartment mocked him as he stepped inside. He had a couch, a big flat screen TV, and a battered footlocker that acted as a coffee table, but no pictures on the wall or decorations laying around. He changed his clothes, put on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt, then looked in the fridge for a beer.

The only things in his fridge were a bottle of ketchup, a jar of mayo, and three eggs that were probably about to hatch dinosaurs they’d been in there so long.

“Well, shit,” he muttered.

Socks, sneakers, wallet, phone, and make sure the gun is locked in the safe. Check. There was a bar about two blocks from the apartment, and they would have beer. And whiskey. And he wouldn’t have to sit at home with the TV and his memories of Michael Francis Donovan.

Keys tucked into his pocket, he locked the doors and headed out. No, he wouldn’t be driving. A walk home would sober him up enough to manage to get the key into the keyhole, or so he’d learned over the eighteen months he’d been living here.

It was still daylight when he landed outside the door of the Copper Ceili Pub, better known as ‘the Coppah’. It sat in the middle between his precinct station and his apartment, making it his neighborhood bar. It was also *the* cop bar for this area, which he probably should have considered before deciding to come on this particular day. Dinner time wasn’t too busy, but there were enough faces turned to give him a solemn nod or an ‘it’s a shame, Kennedy’ with their awkward condolences at the loss of Donovan.

The bartender, Owen, let him take the last stool in the corner at the bar so he'd be mostly out of sight, then took his order for the dinner special, a whiskey and a pint. The whiskey burned and the pint soothed, and soon he had food to soak up some of the booze.

After the fifth person came by to buy him a drink and offer their sympathies, Owen himself took pity on Kennedy and waved them away.

"Let the man drink in peace, boyo. It's a hard day when you lose your partner and friend," Owen would tell them, and they'd tell him to put a drink on their tab for Kennedy then head on their way.

"At this rate, Kennedy, yer tab will be paid and you'll be drinkin' free for a month," Owen said as he slid another pint in front of him.

"Fine with me," Kennedy said.

"Yer not driving, are ya?" Owen asked.

"Never do," Kennedy replied.

"Good on ya," Owen said and left him to his beer.

As the night wore on, Kennedy needed the wall beside him to keep him on his stool, and finally Owen cut him off.

"Time to head home, my man," Owen said.

"Yer prolly right," Kennedy mumbled. "I'll settle up t'morra if'n that's fine?"

"You're all set and then some. Go on, get home safe, will ya?" Owen replied.

A fumbled salute and Kennedy headed out the door. The cooler air helped enough that he could tell where the sidewalk ended, and not much more. He started walking towards his apartment, or so he hoped, but he couldn't even be sure he had headed in the right direction.

Funny thing was, he didn't really care. He started to sing as he staggered on his way.

"And since it falls...unto my lot...that I should rise...and you should not..." he sang.

“Yo, old man, shaddup. You sound like my grandma’s cat, howling out the window.” Two teenagers walked toward him, full of attitude.

“Ohh, give to me...the parting glass...” Kennedy sang as he stumbled past the first one, but the second one stepped into his path and made him stop. “Out of m’way.”

“Nope,” the kid said as a fist landed in his gut. He bowed forward and the kid behind him grabbed his shoulders and pulled him back. They kicked and punched him until he curled on the ground, then searched his pockets. When they found his wallet, they pulled out the cash and went to look at his credit cards – but saw his police ID instead.

“Oh, fuck, a cop,” one said and they dropped the wallet and ran.

Kennedy fumbled for his wallet and pulled it to his chest. He heard a familiar voice say, “Jaysus bloody hell, Jamie. Hang on, Kennedy, we’ve got ya,” and then it all went dark.

Chapter Two

Jamie knew before he opened his eyes that he was *not* in his bedroom. The light was never this bright in his bedroom, thanks to the other buildings nearby. He also knew that he'd drank more than his share last night, because his mouth tasted of blood and stale beer.

"Wake the fuck up, Jamie. We caught a case and you're already late."

One eyeball peeled open to see his partner, Michael Donovan, seated on his coffee table.

"What the hell, Mike?" Jamie groaned. "I sincerely regret ever giving you a key. Fine, I've got to shower and then we can go."

"Drunk off your ass, you are. Got yourself rolled like a bum in the subway, too. Go shower and let's move. We're gonna hear it from Sarge for being so late," Mike said.

Jamie whimpered as he rolled to his feet, then swayed for a moment. "I'll stop at Dunkies and get him a cruller. He'll forgive anything for that," he said as he peeled off his clothes on the way to the bathroom.

The shower was fast and hot, and illuminated all of the bruises from his beating last night. Jamie barely remembered yesterday, and right now, he simply wanted to remember to put his pants on correctly. It felt like it took him forever to get

dressed, but he found his wallet, keys, and phone on the counter in the kitchen next to a note that said “Call if you have questions. Got you home last night – Joe.”

“Okay, let’s roll,” Jamie said, then realized Mike must’ve already headed down to the car. He locked up and found his car, then got in and started it up.

“Hit the drive thru at Dunkies and let’s go. How did we ever solve a case when you were this out of it?” Mike asked and Jamie nearly jumped through the roof.

“Were you in the car all along?” Jamie asked, then shook his head and pulled out into traffic.

A large dark roast, cream and three sugars, and a box of assorted with at least two crullers in it, and Jamie was back on the road. “Shouldn’t we head to the scene instead of the station?” Jamie asked. He put his coffee in the cup holder, pulled out a random donut, then handed the box to Donovan. Jamie almost hit the car in front of him when the box landed on the floor.

“Come on, Mike, don’t drop the donuts all over my car, will ya?”

“Sorry,” Mike said. “We need to go to the station first so you can check what they’ve already pulled together.”

“Why would someone else have pulled anything on our case if we just caught it this morning?” Jamie asked.

“Because it’s not our case. Yet.”

He didn’t know if it was the high-octane coffee or the sugar rush, but Jamie slammed on his brakes and nearly got rear-ended by the truck behind him. He took a couple of quick breaths, then pulled over to the side of the road and put the car in park.

He had just remembered.

“You’re dead.”

“I know I’m dead. We need to solve my murder,” Mike said.

“But you’re dead.”

“Yes, I’m well aware. Now are you going to go to the station and check the file or what?”

“I got drunk last night, then I got mugged, and Joey and Paul found me, but I passed out. I must have a brain bleed or something,” Jamie said. He carefully checked the traffic, then pulled out and took the next right to take himself to the hospital. “I’ll just go to the ER and get checked out and they can tell me what got scrambled and I’ll be fine.”

“You’re already fine, Jamie. Nothing’s wrong with you,” Mike said.

“Nope, I’m not talking to my *dead* partner’s ghost. Nope.”

“Fine, then I’ll talk. They’re going to say I was carjacked, beaten, then thrown out of my own car on the side of the road. That’s not what happened. Nicky Carrera pulled a gun on me. He put me in the back of a dark blue Ford van, while one of his guys took my car. Two other guys in the back of the van worked me over with weighted gloves and a tire iron, then rolled me out into that ditch,” Mike said. “He said it was payback for us putting his boy away for that murder down at the docks. Said his boy didn’t do it.”

“We had Tony Carrera dead to rights in that case. His prints, his DNA, witnesses, and no alibi,” Jamie said.

“Well, Nicky feels strongly enough about it that I’m dead and you’re next on his hit list,” Mike replied.

“If your death was a Carrera hit, then there’ll be a ‘C’ carved on your body somewhere,” Jamie said.

“So, go to the morgue and find out,” Mike replied. “I didn’t see them do that part. I died and it took a bit to figure things out before I could get back to my body – just in time to get rolled out of a van going forty so I could land in a ditch.”

Jamie pulled up to the Emergency entrance to the hospital and parked. He refused to look back at his car as he locked it up and headed inside.

“I’m going crazy, I know it,” Jamie muttered to himself, then went up to the window and explained that he was a detective and had been attacked last night – and thought maybe something was wrong with his head.

Four hours and several tests later, Jamie was signing papers and putting his insurance cards back in his wallet. They told him they would call him if the experts noticed anything, but from what the doctors and technicians could tell, he was just fine.

Jamie decided he was also starving, but since he was already here, he headed down to the morgue to see what he could find out.

“Hey, Finney,” Jamie said as he stepped into the morgue.

“Kennedy, you shouldn’t be here,” Dr. Finney said. “Don’t they give you guys a day off or something when your partner’s killed?”

“Yeah, but I need to know something about Donovan’s death. Have you done the autopsy yet?”

“I have. I also shouldn’t be talking to you about this.”

“Why not? Because I knew the guy? I’m a detective, Finney.”

“It just doesn’t feel right.”

“He wasn’t my boyfriend, Finney. He was my partner. Can you tell me if you found anything weird?”

“Weird like what?”

“Like something that didn’t come from a beating and getting tossed out of a moving vehicle?”

Finney hesitated for a moment, then pulled out a thick folder and sorted through the contents until he found a photo and laid it on top to show Jamie. “This wasn’t from a beating, or from him being tossed.”

The photo showed a neatly carved letter C inside of a triangle in the middle of Mike’s chest.

“Well, damn,” Jamie whispered. “He was right.”

“Who was right?” Finney asked.

“Just someone. One of my confidential informants,” Jamie replied.

“Your CI knew that this would be on the body?”

“Yeah. Thanks, Finney. Appreciate the info,” Jamie said and left the morgue.

When he got back to his car, he was relieved to find that Mike, or whatever that was, no longer sat inside. He picked up the donut box and pulled out two, eating them right there, washed down with cold coffee. A few things needed to happen, in case he really was brain-scrambled, and the first thing was he needed to get some supplies in his house. A text on his phone from his commander told him he was not to come in for five days, so he drove to the grocery store and spent a couple hundred on groceries and beer. Then he went home and hauled all of the stuff up to his apartment and put it away. Jamie then changed into jeans and a sweatshirt, cleaned up the clothes from last night, and made himself a sandwich. Only then did he open up his laptop to log in to the Harbor Police Department database and see who had caught Mike’s murder and if they’d posted anything about it.

“Oh, *hell* no,” Mike said from his spot to Jamie’s right. “They did *not* give my murder case to Dumb and Dumber.”

Jamie yelped and nearly fell off his chair. “Dammit, Mike, don’t *do* that. You’re gonna give me a heart attack.”

“Sorry, I’m new to this ghost stuff. I’ve been here since you started bringing in the groceries. Guess I just wasn’t visible.”

“Pete Dumbaugh and Anna Dumbeck have the case, yes,” Jamie said. He agreed with Mike, it was not great. They really had earned the ‘Dumb and Dumber’ nickname, even without their unfortunate surnames.

“That settles it. We have to solve it because they sure as hell won’t,” Mike said.

“Right. Because I can tell them my information came from the deceased.”

“What did you find in the morgue?” Mike asked.

“The letter C carved on your chest, outlined with a triangle,” Jamie replied.

“Told ya.”

“Told me what? That Carrera was behind it? Great. I’m sure you’d be a great one to bring in for a lineup. Never mind the fact that *I* am convinced I’ve got brain damage and am talking to myself here.”

“Look, I don’t know why you can see me. No one else can. Not Katie, not Maureen, or Kevin. None of them. Even Elise didn’t see me. I managed to knock over a vase of flowers, but that was it.”

He could hear the sadness in his partner’s voice. “Look, Mike. If this is your ghost, maybe it’s so we can solve this and give your family some closure. I know I need to do this for myself if not for them. Maybe I am nuts and you’re just a projection of my need to work this out with you. I really don’t know. But for now, I’m going to do what I can to get Carrera and his boys locked up for taking you away from us,” Jamie said.

“Thanks, Jamie. That means a lot. Okay, pull up some mug shots and I’ll see if I can ID the other guys that were there,” Mike said.

“Yeah, I’m not sure how to rationalize this to myself, so I’m gonna just shut up and roll with it for now,” Jamie said and pulled up the files.

Two hours, another sandwich, and a fresh pot of coffee later, they had the names of the other three guys besides Nicky Carrera that were involved in Mike’s murder.

“Just tell them a CI told you,” Mike said.

“But a CI *didn’t* tell me,” Jamie replied.

“I’m your CI,” Mike said with a grin.

“You’re my hallucination. I can’t submit this without more proof. It gives *me* something to work on, but I can’t add any of this to the case file until I have more than my whacked-out brain telling me it is so.”

“If you say so,” Mike said. “Although I think you’re just making it harder on yourself.”

“Do me a favor and go bug someone else for a while? I’ve got a headache and want to just think for a bit,” Jamie said.

“Sure thing. See you later,” Mike said and disappeared.

He took a couple of pain pills and downed a bottle of water, then Jamie stretched out on his couch. Everything hurt and he needed a breather.

A nap wasn’t a bad idea, either.

Chapter Three

The nap helped, but Jamie still had a sneaking suspicion something was medically wrong with him. The brain was a strange and wonderful instrument that science still didn't fully understand – so of course something had to be wrong with his, right?

Nothing else made sense.

Nothing else could explain why he woke to the sound of his dead partner pacing the length of his tiny apartment.

“Mike, for the love of all that's holy, will you *stop*?” Jamie said as he sat up and ran a hand through his hair.

“Oh, I didn't think you could hear me this time. Sorry, man.” Mike said.

“I thought ghosts were supposed to be quiet,” Jamie muttered. He got up and started a fresh pot of coffee, then pulled out a can of beef stew, dumped it in a bowl, and stuck it in the microwave.

“You really need to eat better,” Mike said.

“I'm not the one that's dead,” Jamie replied.

“I didn't die because of the crap I ate.”

“Weren't you coming back from the grocery store?”

“Okay, you’ve got a point there, but I was buying milk and toilet paper. Not crappy beef stew.”

Jamie pulled the bowl out of the microwave, buttered some bread, and brought his food and a beer over to the couch.

“It’s pretty sad that you eat most of your meals in front of the TV,” Mike said.

“It’s better than eating my meals in front of a disapproving wife,” Jamie replied.

“Elise has been really good with Katie and the kids. They’ve made arrangements with Doherty’s Funeral services for when my body is released. At least I managed to get my will and all of that in order.”

“We did that together when we became detectives,” Jamie said. “Both of us want to be cremated, because the idea of worms is disgusting and creeped us out.”

“I remember,” Mike said.

“No, *I’m* remembering and you’re not real,” Jamie replied. He turned on the Red Sox game and ate the rest of his meal in silence.

Half asleep, the game still going, Jamie heard a knock on his door. “Who is it?” he called out.

“It’s Joe. Lemme in.”

Jamie got up and peered through the peep hole to see Joe Mahoney on the landing. He opened the door and gave Joe a wry smile. “Thanks for hauling my drunk ass home last night.”

“You’re welcome. Paulie and I stepped out of the pub and saw those two punks running away. You insisted you were fine, but I wanted to make sure,” Joe said.

“I went to the ER today to get checked out. They said other than some pretty bruises, I’m fine. I’m watching the game. You want to come in for a few and have a beer?”

“Sure. Did you eat yet?” Joe asked.

“A couple of hours ago, why?”

“How about I order pizza?”

“You’re gonna pay for pizza?” Jamie teased.

“Why not? You’re supplying the beer. Besides, unless you did some shopping, you ain’t got nuthin’ in this place I’d want to eat.”

“I shopped – but pizza sounds good. I don’t care what you get, but no fish, no fruit,” Jamie said as he went to grab a couple of beers.

“Right. One extra large pineapple and anchovy pizza, coming up,” Joe said as he pulled out his phone. “Gah, that sounds so disgusting, I can’t even joke about it.”

“At least I can’t smell it if he does get that,” Mike said.

“Shut up,” Jamie hissed and Joe gave him a confused look. “No, Joe, not you. The, uh, neighbor’s dog is yapping again. I wish it would just shut up.” He turned to glare at Mike, then mouthed ‘get lost’.

Mike just shrugged and wandered into the kitchen.

“Twenty minutes,” Joe said as he stuffed his phone into his shirt pocket, accepted the beer from Jamie and sat on the couch.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, eyes on the game, then Joe spoke up. “I’m going to say something here, and I hope I’m not out of line, but if you need help figuring out who did this to Mikey, let me know.”

“I take it you saw who caught the case, huh?” Jamie said.

“Frikken Dumb and Dumber. I went up to the Chief of D’s and asked him to give it to someone, *anyone* else and he said he couldn’t – but that he’d be watching every move and double checking all their work. He then said that if I happened to find out anything that would help solve the case, he’d be appreciative. *Appreciative*, he said. In other words, someone up the chain is making noise and he can’t officially pass it off, but he hopes those of us with half a brain will help solve a frikken cop murder and not let it go cold.”

“I don’t think Mike would let his case grow cold,” Jamie said, then froze for a sec before he put the bottle to his lips.

“Yeah, he’d probably come back from the dead and kick our asses,” Joe said and took a drink himself.

Jamie made a concerted effort to focus on pizza and the ball game, and not slip up and talk about Mike as if he weren’t sitting in the recliner to his right. Mike didn’t stay quiet, either. He kept commenting on the game and on the lack of pizza in his hands and the craving for a beer, ad nauseum.

Joe finally got ready to leave when the game ended. “Y’know, Jamie, it was like Mike was right here with us the whole time. I could almost hear him bitching out the umpire over that call in the eighth inning.”

Jamie, who *had* heard Mike bitching out the umpire, gave Joe a sickly grin. “Yeah. It’s gonna take some time before I get used to the idea that he’s really gone.”

Joe gave Jamie a pat on the shoulder, then headed out the door. “Call me if you need anything,” he said as he left.

Jamie locked the door behind him, then bounced his forehead off the painted steel.

“What’s the matter?” Mike asked.

“Do you realize how fast they will rip my badge from me and lock my ass up in a psych ward if I slip up and talk to you, or about you, as if you’re still around?” Jamie was tired, frustrated, angry...and more than a little terrified.

“But...”

“No,” Jamie snarled and turned to face the very real figure of his partner’s shade. “You keep showing up and acting like you’re *not* dead and I’m going to slip up and say something in front of the wrong people at the wrong time. *Then* who will you get to solve your fucking murder? It sure as hell won’t be me, because I’ll be in a hug-myself jacket in a padded room, with the key thrown away.”

“But...”

“Shut up!” Jamie yelled, then walked *through* Mike’s form. Probably not the smartest thing to do, since both of them had a bad reaction. Mike poofed out of the space and Jamie felt a teeth-rattling chill, then fainted. He wasn’t out for long, but it was enough that he seriously wondered if he had brain damage or something. He shut off the TV and the lights, then crawled into his bed. Late summer, and he was so chilled, he left his clothes on and pulled up the extra blanket. Even then, it took him a while before he fell asleep.



Ten the next morning, Jamie had showered and pulled on some clothes, then decided to clean his place. When he was working, he really only slept here, but if he had to be stuck for a few days, he could at least wipe down a few surfaces or something.

As the day wore on and his apartment sparkled, Jamie tried to not think about the fact he hadn’t seen Mike’s ghost all day. Part of him wondered if he’d shattered the illusion when he walked through the mirage, while the other part of him felt like he’d done something unforgivable and it brought him near to tears.

“No. I won’t cry over this. I won’t,” Jamie said to himself.

“Good, because tears ain’t gonna solve my murder,” Mike said.

Jamie whirled around and failed to hide the grin when he saw Mike leaned up against the fridge.

“I thought I’d done something bad,” Jamie said.

“Naw, I need to figure out how to be better at this ghost stuff. There is no real sense of time here. I feel a sense of urgency, but that’s just my emotions. I also need to be more considerate because you’re right. You slip up and we’re both done.”

“I’m still not convinced that I don’t have brain damage and am hallucinating this whole thing,” Jamie said.

“Yeah, I know – and I don’t blame you. I sure as hell wouldn’t be taking it half as well if the roles were switched.”

“I probably should stop in and see how Katie is, but I’m not in any mood to deal with Elise. It would be bad if I shot my ex wife in your front yard or something.”

“I knew things were bad, but she’s really kind of a raging twat where you’re concerned, isn’t she?” Mike said.

“I wasn’t blameless in the whole thing, but I also wasn’t the one that ended up in someone else’s bed. She knew I was a cop when we got married. She knew I was a cop for fourteen years of that marriage. I guess Elise decided that it was time she did what she wanted, and to hell with our marriage. To hell with me.”

“So, you were guilty of working overtime to help pay for her college courses and the kids lessons and that nice house and the pool she had to have...and she decided you were gone too much and found a toy to keep her company.”

“Pretty much, although I don’t think Roderick Venzetti the *third* would like to be called a ‘toy’.”

“Ohh, the *third*. I see. Is she still seeing him?”

“No clue. I stopped caring who was in her bed when I no longer slept in it.”

“Why didn’t you tell me all of this when I was alive?” Mike asked.

“I told you enough, but I wasn’t going to talk shit about my ex, when you might say something to Katie – and it would get back to Elise, and she’d raise holy hell and screw with my visitation again.”

“Good point. I could never keep my mouth shut around Katie. That’s how she never questioned if I was faithful or not. I’d walk in the house, take one look at those big blue eyes, and spill my guts.”

“And I knew that, so I was careful what I said around you. No point in me fucking up your marriage with the mess mine had become.”

“I had no idea,” Mike said with a sigh. “Hey, have you checked the HPD files yet today?”

“Not yet. I decided if I had to actually spend time in my apartment, I should probably clean it. Took me ten minutes to find a place to plug in the vacuum. Guess I haven’t done that in a while.”

“Gross, man. You can’t let your place get that dirty.”

“It wasn’t *that* dirty. I mean, I’m hardly ever here.”

“So? Go check the files. Not like *I* can type on the keyboard or anything.”

“Fine,” Jamie said and put the last of the cleaning supplies away. He poured a mug of coffee and sat down at the table with the laptop. A few keystrokes and he opened up the file. “Looks like the autopsy report is in here now.”

“I can’t look at that yet,” Mike said. “You do it.”

“Gee, thanks. I don’t know if I want to see the whole thing yet, either.”

“Well, *one* of us has to read it, and since you’re the only one that can feel the mouse pad, that’s you.”

Jamie gave Mike a look and rolled his eyes. “Fine, I’ll download a copy and check it later if I need it. Right now, I want to see any interviews from the canvass they should have done.”

A few clicks later and Jamie was on the phone to Joe. “Joe, I was just checking the file on Mike’s murder. What the actual fuck, man?”

“I know, I know. We’ve got four of us out here now, and a handful of uniforms doing the canvass right now. Already put in the warrant to dump the grocery store’s security cameras and a traffic cam on the parkway. Hopefully, the data hasn’t already been wiped,” Joe said.

“Need another body?” Jamie asked.

“Naw, we’re good. If you like, though, I’ll come by with my laptop and the camera dumps and you can help me scour it once we get them,” Joe said.

“I’m in. Just let me know and I’ll put the coffee on.”

“I’ll call when we have it. Later,” Joe said and disconnected the call.

“I take it that the two twits didn’t even do the canvass yet?” Mike asked.

“Nope. Didn’t dump the security cameras at the store or in the area, either. Joe’s got the store dump and a traffic cam on the parkway with warrants. We just have to hope they’re on a 7 day write over instead of a 24 hour one.”

“If my murder goes unsolved because of those two idiots, I’ll make their lives a living hell.”

“Do you *really* want to spend *any* time around those two?” Jamie asked.

“Okay, you have a point. But maybe I can ask someone else to torment them. There’s enough bored ghosts over here.”

Jamie opened his mouth, then closed it again. There were some things he just wasn’t ready to ask. Not yet. This was still just a hallucination – or so he hoped.

Chapter Four

Joe sat in front of his laptop on one side of the table with Jamie in front of his own to the right. A bowl of tortilla chips and two smaller bowls of salsa were within their reach, and they had coffee, soft drinks, and plates that once held really good Mexican take out. This time, Jamie had paid for the take out while Joe had brought the soft drinks, chips, and salsa – and the video data dumps he'd claimed from evidence.

It took a lot longer than one might think to go through videos. While they knew roughly when Mike had been taken, they would need to watch a bit before and a bit after that time to see the actual event – then go back to see when the perps had first arrived. Getting an idea of how many were there, who they were, see if they could get a good face shot, and then seeing what they did while they were at the site meant there was a lot of detail to record.

“I’ve done this a million times,” Jamie said, “But it never bothered me as much as it does now. Watching my partner and best friend go through this just sucks.”

“I hesitated to ask you to help, but I know if it was Paulie, I’d want to do something...*anything*...to help catch the fuckers that did this.”

“Hey, wait a minute,” Jamie said after a few more minutes. “Look at this. The van that picked up Mike is not the one that dumped him. Different make,

different shades of paint, different plates, and even if the plates were stolen, they're not the same vehicles."

"Well, damn, you're right. The one that dumped him was darker than the one that grabbed him, and a Dodge, while the one they used to grab him was a Ford. Plates on the first one come back to a Toyota Camry, so we know they were stolen. Can you see the full plate on the other one?" Joe asked.

"No, just the first three letters," Jamie said.

"That guy looks like Nicky Carrera," Jamie said as he pointed to a profile shot of the driver from the grocery store.

"Again, I think you're right. See? We're gonna solve this before Dumb and Dumber pull their heads out of each other's backsides," Joe said.

"That wasn't a visual I needed," Jamie said and they both chuckled.

The chips and salsa were gone, the coffee pot emptied, and Joe yawned for the third time in ten minutes, so Jamie nudged his arm.

"Joe, pack it up and go home. We've done a lot of good work tonight, and you can hand it to Sarge tomorrow. It's a start," Jamie said.

"Yeah, you're right. Thanks for the help," Joe said.

"No, thank you for including me. We should see if there are any more cameras between the store and the dump spot. Maybe we can find out where the switch happened."

"No one has even mentioned there *was* a switch yet, so they're probably not even looking for it. Just assumed the grab, beating, murder, and dump all happened from the same van," Joe said.

"I'll take a look tomorrow and let you know what I find," Jamie replied as he cleaned up the dishes. "Call me if you learn anything, and I'll do the same."

"You bet," Joe said and headed out.

Jamie locked up behind him and turned off some lights before he sat back down at the laptop.

“I thought he’d never leave,” Mike said.

Jamie startled and nearly spilled his drink. “Be nice. He’s helping figure out what the hell happened.”

“I know, but I can’t talk to you when he’s around and it’s not like I can make a note to remember to tell you something later,” Mike said.

“True. I need to save these files on my backup drive and then I’m going to bed. Tomorrow, I’m going to drive around and see if there are any more cameras that might have caught what happened. Now that we know there was a transfer between vehicles, there’s more to look for.”

“I can go look tonight. Maybe I’ll remember something,” Mike said.

“If you want. I’ll see you in the morning,” Jamie replied as he shut everything down and headed to bed.

Mike watched him go into the bedroom, then slid through the front door. The sense of urgency, of time running out for him had grown. He needed to get answers before he wasn’t around to hear them any more.



The next morning, Jamie woke, showered, pulled on jeans and a clean shirt, and made himself breakfast. Something was niggling in the back of his mind and he couldn’t figure out what it was. Usually, when this happened, he’d go for a run and if that didn’t work, he’d talk it out with Mike. Considering there was a chance he was also a target, going for a run didn’t seem like the best idea. Also, considering he figured Mike’s ghost was a hallucination, talking it out with his dead partner really didn’t seem like the best idea, either.

He sat down to eat his breakfast and called his doctor.

“Harbor Medical Center, Dr. Sanders office, how may I help you today?”

“This is Jameson Kennedy, I had some tests done the other day and I need to know the results.”

“Of course, Mr. Kennedy. If there was any problem, the doctor would have had us call you for an appointment – but I can check the files myself.”

“Right, thanks.”

“It looks like everything came back normal. Are you still exhibiting symptoms of a concussion or other brain injury?”

“Not that I know of. If things get weird again, I’ll make an appointment.”

“Dizziness, strange smells or tastes, uncontrollable muscle spasms might be signs of...”

“No, I don’t have any of that,” Jamie interrupted the horrifying list. “I’m fine. Thanks for the information.”

He didn’t even wait to say goodbye, just disconnected the call and shuddered – then nearly screamed when Mike spoke from behind him.

“Good thing you can’t smell me. I haven’t had a shower in days,” Mike said.

“Goddammit, would you stop doing that?” Jamie yelled.

“Now are you ready to admit that you can see my ghost?”

“Would you be? I mean, seriously, Mike. What the actual fuck? I’m supposed to be helping your wife and family. I’m supposed to be adjusting to the fact you’re gone. Instead, I’m working on solving your murder, based off the few scraps of information you could give me. Solving your murder – with *your* help. Do you realize how insane that sounds?”

“Yeah, I get it. And it looks like you’re the only one that can see or hear me. But you went and got all those tests. Nothing is physically wrong with you. Mentally? Maybe, but that doesn’t explain how I could tell you things that you could later prove with good detective work. Although, the two vans and getting moved from one to the other is a surprise to me, too. Best I can figure is I was killed in one, and the time it took me to figure out I was dead and get back to my

body is when I ended up in van number two and rolled into the ditch. I didn't see or hear anything that I can remember from the second van. I literally ended up back at my body as I was rolled out and hit the ditch."

"So we know when you were grabbed, and the autopsy told us when you died, but we have no idea how much time you spent *somewhere* after you died and before your body was found. You could have been in that ditch for ten minutes or two hours. The one thing that does trip me up is when we told Katie you were dead, she said that wasn't possible because you'd just called to ask her if the store brand was fine. But the autopsy said you had been dead for over four hours by the time I showed up on your doorstep."

"So, if I didn't call her, who did?" Mike asked.

"Let me get Joe to pull the phone records," Jamie replied as he called up Joe's number and hit dial.

"*Mahoney*," Joe answered.

"Joe, it's Jamie. We need a dump of Katie Donovan's phone records."

"*You don't think...?*"

"No, but I just remembered something. When Edgars and I went to make the notification, she said that Mike couldn't be dead because he'd just called her to ask if the store brand was okay to buy. Mike had already been dead over four hours by the time we got to her house."

"*Right, so if Mike didn't call her, who did? Or did they just text from Mike's phone? I didn't see his phone in the evidence report – but that's not saying we don't have it.*"

"Can you take care of those things?"

"*I'll do it now. Get the warrant on the phone dump and see if his phone is here, or if we can find out where the hell it is with a ping.*"

"Let me know what you find. Thanks, Joe."

"*Roger that.*"

“He thinks Katie is involved, doesn’t he?” Mike asked as Jamie disconnected the call.

“Well, I would think the same if I didn’t know she puked all over the place the time she hit that cat at the end of your driveway.”

“True. I’m betting someone texted her from my phone.”

“Was that normal for you? A text instead of a call?” Jamie asked.

“At a store or something? Yeah. I don’t...didn’t like being on the phone in a public place.”

“So it’s likely it was one of your killers that sent that text. Hey, you said you would look for cameras last night. Did you find any?”

“Yeah, there’s one on the corner of Lexington and Salem, and one in the other direction on the bank about halfway down Lex. Since I have no clue which way we turned, those can at least tell you.”

Jaime texted that info to Joe as well, then got up to refill his coffee.

“Man, I miss coffee,” Mike said with a sigh.

“I, uh, would offer you some but I’m not sure how that would work,” Jamie said.

“It’d end up with coffee all over your floor,” Mike replied. “But I appreciate the gesture.”

Jamie could tell something was bothering Mike – other than the fact he was dead. “Whatcha thinking about?”

“I’m wondering if maybe I missed something,” Mike replied. “I could never lie to Katie, but I never thought she could lie to me. I don’t think she has, but now I’m starting to wonder.”

“I wouldn’t wonder too hard, Mike. Katie’s reaction when I told her you were dead was not faked.”

“The other thing I keep wondering? What the hell were they doing with my body for four hours? Were they waiting for something? Trying to decide how to dump it? Doing something nasty to it?”

“I skimmed the autopsy report. There were traces of butane on your clothes. My guess is we’ll find the murder scene van torched somewhere and there was an argument about whether or not to leave your body inside when they did it.”

Mike shuddered. “Ugh, no thanks. Coming back into my body as it burned up? That would’ve scarred me for life.”

Jamie blinked at him, then started to chuckle. Before long, he was laughing – a good, hard laugh.

Mike looked offended. “We’re talking about my body being torched, partner. I don’t find that very funny.”

Jamie gasped between laughs. “Scarred...for life.”

“Oh,” Mike said, then it hit him. “*Ohh*,” and he started to laugh with Jamie.

“Yeah, that was kind of a funny thing to say.”

Jamie wiped his eyes and caught his breath. “I think I needed that,” he told Mike. “Gah, my sides hurt from laughing so hard.”

“It wasn’t *that* funny,” Mike grumbled.

“Maybe not, but I needed the laugh. My shoulders have been knotted up for the past few days.” He wiped a hand down his face and took a swallow of coffee.

“Okay, so let me make sure we have this all down. Nicky Carrera pulled a gun on you just after you opened your driver’s side door in the grocery store lot. He took your keys and gave them to one of his guys to drive your car. He forced you into a dark blue Ford van, then two of his guys beat you while he drove away. Correct so far?”

“I think so, yeah,” Mike said.

“Were you restrained? Did you get any hits in on them?” Jamie asked.

“I wasn’t restrained, but I got my bell rung pretty hard the minute I got into the van. Nicky said, ‘You and your partner are gonna both pay for what you did to my Tony.’ Then the guy with the weighted gloves hit the side of my head and things faded in and out for what felt like forever, but in reality had probably only

been a couple of minutes. They didn't waste any time making me dead," Mike said.

"I still haven't heard back from Joey about your phone. I need to get that info, before I go talk to your wife again. I'm afraid I'll let my suspicions show otherwise."

"I also need to know what they did with my body for four hours. And, Jamie? I'm feeling like we're running out of time. We need to solve this before I end up not hearing the final determination," Mike said.

"When do you think your deadline is? Pun unintended, but it works, right?" Jamie asked.

"I don't know. Maybe when I'm buried? I really have no idea, but the sense of urgency – of time running out – is growing."

"You know I'm doing my best here, right? Hang in there, partner. We'll figure this out," Jamie said. "I've got three more days before I have to report back to work. As soon as I hear from Joe about the phone, I'll go see Katie and see what she needs. Deal?"

"Deal," Mike replied.

Chapter Five

When the boss's boss calls you and asks you to do something, you do it. That's how Jamie found himself sitting at Mike's desk in their shared office, a couple of file boxes on the floor beside him. The Chief of Detectives had called Jamie around nine that morning and woke him from another alcohol-induced sleep. At least, this time, he'd done all of his drinking at home.

"Yeah," Jamie said into the phone.

"*Kennedy? It's Chief Lanaghan,*" the voice said.

"Oh, hey, Chief. Sorry, the phone woke me," Jamie said as he pushed himself upright.

"My apologies. Mrs. Donovan has asked if we'd pack up Mike's desk and bring it to her. She thinks a couple of his medals are in there and she's doing a display or something for the funeral."

"Okay?" Jamie said, his confusion apparent in his voice.

"She specifically asked for you to do it because, as she put it, she didn't want some stranger digging through Mike's stuff."

"Gotcha. Well, I can be there in about an hour, if that works?"

"That's fine, Kennedy. I'm not about to tell a grieving widow that she needs to cool her jets. If Mrs. Donovan needs this stuff now, then we'll get it to her asap."

Stop by my office once you're done?"

"Sure, Chief. Will do. Thank you, sir." The Chief disconnected the call, and Jamie groaned.

"Your wife is a pain in my ass," Jamie said out loud, then stumbled to his feet and got the shower running.

"What's going on now?" Mike's voice came from outside the open bathroom door.

"That was Chief Lanaghan. Katie called him and specifically asked for *me* to empty out your desk today. Me, no one else, and she's looking for some medals or something to do a display for the funeral."

"Oh, man. I'm sorry," Mike sighed. "Yeah, my last three awards are in their cases in the bottom drawer, way in the back. There's also that bottle of bourbon that FBI agent gave us after that case with the guy from Tennessee who had found his way to Harbor. It's still unopened, so I guess it's all yours."

"I guess so," Jamie said as he came out of the bathroom. "Any surprises I should be aware of? Things I shouldn't box up for Katie?"

"Nothing that even hints at a case. No photos of me with other cops, nothing like that. I kept work far away from my family and that has to hold even now."

"That's not a problem. So, just the family photos, your two mugs, the awards, and those framed certificates – right?"

"Yeah, the rest you can keep or toss or whatever. Thanks, man," Mike said.

"It's going to be hard to do this, but it's a lot less difficult because I know you're sort of still around," Jamie said.

"Hah, I knew you'd admit it eventually."

"I'm not admitting anything. Shaddup."



Jamie stared at the photo in his hand. Mikey, Paulie, Joey, and himself all outside the Copper last St. Paddy's day. They were all wearing those plastic green fedoras as they hung all over each other. Jamie remembered they had given the phone to one of the waitresses to take the photo and she'd tried to get a kiss in payment from each one of them. Only Paulie had kissed the girl.

The rest of the stuff in Mike's desk were old pens, sticky notes, and a couple of his case notebooks. Jamie tucked the photo and the case books into his bag alongside the bourbon. A stack of case files got moved to his desk, and the box of things to go to Katie got closed up and put by the door.

A sharp rap on the door and his Sergeant came in.

"Getting Donovan's things for his wife?" Sarge said.

"Yes, sir. Chief Lanaghan called me this morning," Jamie replied.

"How are you doing?"

"Well as could be expected, I guess. It still doesn't feel like he's gone."

"It won't for a while. I lost a partner in a line of duty shooting my fourth year as a patrol officer. It took me a while to get my shit straight."

"Sorry to hear that, Sarge. I keep expecting him to drop by and rip me a new one for being late or not tracking his case more closely."

"Mahoney told me you've been helping him a bit, and that's fine with me. Just don't run off and try anything on your own, ya hear me? No vigilante justice from you. I get that he was like a brother to you, and I know how pissed I am that he was taken from us – I can guess you're about ten times more pissed. Particularly with the nitwits that caught the case. I can promise you, Kennedy, I'm doing everything I can to stay on top of those two. Assigning Mahoney and Giannetti to the case as secondaries was the best I could do."

"I appreciate it all, Sarge. I really do. If I couldn't help find Mikey's killer, I'd probably lose what little sanity I've got left."

“Keep your chin up, Kennedy. And if you need more time away from your desk, just let me know. Considering neither one of you took a vacation day unless I ordered it, you’ve got plenty of time. Your accumulated time - and his leftover time – are now on your file. That’s what we do around here.”

“Thanks, Sarge. I might want to pop in now and then, but I don’t think I can really give my best work until after the funeral. Everything feels like it’s on hold until then, y’know?”

“I hear you. I’ll see you at the funeral and we can talk then, agreed?”

“Agreed. Thank you, sir.”

Sarge had been leaning on the desk. He stood up and gave Jamie’s shoulder an awkward pat, then left the room.

“Well, that was awkward,” Mike said and Jamie sighed, got to his feet, and closed the blinds.

“At least now they won’t see me talking to myself,” Jamie said and dropped back into his seat.

“I remembered something. My dress blues are hanging in the closet here. I picked them up from the dry cleaners last week and forgot to bring them home.”

Jamie opened the metal cabinet and pulled out the plastic-wrapped uniform. He laid it over the box by the door and then went back to check if anything else was in there that should go to Katie. “I haven’t poked around in here in a while. Forgot this jacket was in there,” Jamie said as he pulled out a battered rain jacket. The cabinet rocked slightly and something fell to the floor.

“Huh, what was that?” Jamie crouched down to look for what had fallen. He found a rectangular box that had rolled under the edge of the desk. It took him a moment to pick it up and when he stood, Mike cursed.

“Don’t open it,” Mike said.

“Why not?”

“It’s private.”

“Not anymore, old friend. Should I toss it in the box for Katie?”

“Oh, *gods* no. Just toss it in your drawer and when I’m really gone, you can open it.”

“Now I’m curious,” Jamie said and opened the box.

On a bed of velvet lay a gorgeous Piaget men’s watch. “Woah, Mike. Where’d this come from?”

“It was a gift, and I felt weird about it, so I shoved it in the closet. It’s been in there for three years or more.”

“A gift from whom?” Jamie asked.

“Alexandrina Popov.”

“Woah. The Priest’s baby girl? What the hell is Drina Popov doing, giving you a watch worth over twenty grand?”

“She was grateful that I’d rescued her dog from that car accident and brought him to her. If you remember, she ended up in the hospital, so I took the dog home for the night and brought it to her house the next day. It was a pampered little guy. The shelter would’ve been traumatic.”

“Right, I remember now. Katie wouldn’t let it on the bed, so you slept in the guest room with the dog curled up. She took a picture and sent it to me so I would tease you – but I didn’t because I probably would’ve done the same damned thing.”

“Maybe I should sell this and give Katie the money,” Jamie said.

“No,” Mike replied. “Just wear it. Anyone asks, it’s an heirloom.”

“It’s brand new.”

“You think anyone around here is going to know the difference? Just wear it, Jamie. When I’m really gone, you can think fondly of me when you see it.”

Jamie put the box into his bag next to the bourbon. “I’ll think about it.”

“I don’t think there’s anything else that should go to Katie. Have you heard from Joe about the phone yet?”

“No, but I’m going to stop by his desk and ask him before I go. It’s going to be awkward enough without that hovering over everything.”

“Okay, I’ll be around, but I’ll stay out of sight and out of your way. Keep your eyes open, my friend. Remember, I’m not the only one on Carrera’s hit list.”

“Roger that,” Jamie said. He left everything in the office and headed to Joe and Paulie’s office two doors down. A tap on the door and Joe waved him inside.

“Hey, Jamie. Getting Mike’s things for Katie?” Joe asked.

“Yeah. Where’s your other half?” Jamie asked.

“Paulie took a couple of days off. Personal business, he said.”

“Huh. Well, I was wondering if you’d got any info on the phone dump or if they found Mike’s phone?”

“The phone wasn’t in his stuff, so they either tossed it, or kept it. The records show a text came in to Katie’s phone about the time the body was discovered – from Mike’s phone. So she was telling you the truth.”

Jamie let out a breath. “Good. I wasn’t sure how I would face her with that hanging over my head. Appreciate you tracking that down for me.”

“Not a problem. I’m glad you’re helping me with this case. Paulie has been about as useless as tits on a bull. I don’t know what his deal is, but I hope he fixes whatever ‘family issue’ is going on with his days off,” Joe said.

“Is he still having a problem with gambling?” Jamie asked.

“Not that I’ve heard. He cashed out his retirement account six months ago to clear up his debts and said he was done. I guess Sarge’s threat to pull his badge if he didn’t get his shit together was the answer.”

“Speaking of Sarge, I better get my ass in gear and get the box over to Katie before he thinks I’m moving too slow. Let me know if you need anything else,” Jamie said.

“I will. Oh, and be careful. Word on the street is that Carrera might be looking for you, too.”

“I know, I figured as much. That case with Carrera’s son last year? I think that was the motive.”

“I think so, too. I might have more stuff to run by you tonight. I’ll give you a call if I do, yeah?”

“Yeah, thanks, Joe.” Jamie headed back to his office, slung his bag over his shoulder, then folded the plastic-wrapped uniform on top of the box and left the station. It still felt strange, all of the looks of pity and concern as he walked through the building and out to his car. It was easier to just keep his head down and go, so he did.

Once he pulled up to Mike’s house, he sat in the car for a minute. It bothered him that he would be going into his friend’s place – and his friend wouldn’t be there. Not physically, anyway.

Jamie got out, picked up the box and hooked a finger around the uniform’s hanger, then nudged the door shut with his hip. The car locks chirped as he got a few feet away from it and walked up the path to the front door. It opened when he got to the top step and Katie stood behind the screen.

“Katie,” Jamie said. “I brought the things from the office that you asked for.”

“Come on in, Jamie,” Katie replied. “Thanks for bringing them by. Were the medals in his desk?”

“Yeah, there are four padded cases in there, some photos, his coffee mugs. Stuff like that. His dress blues were in the closet, so I brought those as well.”

Katie took the uniform from him and hung it in the hall closet. Jamie walked further inside and put the box on the coffee table.

“I’m sorry I haven’t been by sooner. Is there anything you need taken care of? Anything you need at all?”

“No, people have been very kind and helpful. I heard you were helping Joey with the case, and that means more than coming by if I’m being honest.”

“I’m doing what I can. I can’t just sit around my place and wait for someone else to find the answers, even if I’m also a target,” Jamie said.

“I’d heard they might be coming after you, too,” Katie said. “Is that true?”

“That’s what they’re saying. I haven’t seen any evidence of that, but then again, I’ve not been out much.”

“Neither have I. Elise took the kids to stay at her place for a couple of days. The constant drop by visits and condolences were wearing on them.”

“I’m glad you guys are still close and she can help,” Jamie said.

“Yeah, me too. I’m sorry you two can’t be civil, but I guess I understand.”

Jamie felt a flare of anger and did his best to swallow it. “Something about coming home to find your wife in bed with another man? Yeah, I guess that can be understood.”

“Whatever, Jamie. Don’t start, okay?” Katie said.

“Right. I’ll be going. Call if you need anything else,” Jamie said and headed for the door.

“Thanks again, Jamie,” Katie said as he left the house.

He got into his car and started it up, but before he could pull away, he saw Paulie’s truck pull into the driveway. Jamie watched as the other man jogged up the walkway and entered the house without knocking, displaying a familiarity even Jamie didn’t show.

“I was going to ride back with you, but I think I’m going to go see what Paulie is doing here,” Mike said.

“He’s been helping with some of the home repairs,” Jamie replied. “Joe said he took a couple of days off for personal reasons. I think he’s gambling again – or still – but he might just be trying to be a good guy.”

“So you think I should leave it be? Or what?” Mike asked.

“Leave it. I saw a tool box on the pass-through kitchen counter, so maybe he was working on something and had to go get a part. Either way, we’ve got our own

jobs to do.”

“Yeah? What do we have to do?”

“Stop and get more beer. Joe said he might need help tonight. I’m going to call him and ask him about the other video dumps from those cameras you found.”

“Get some whiskey. You’ll drink less and pass out sooner.”

Jamie had to laugh. Hallucination or not, it had some good ideas.

Chapter Six

Jamie started up the car and hit the bluetooth to call Joe as he pulled out of the store parking lot.

“What’s up, Kennedy?”

“Hey, Joe. I got beer and stuff to make subs at home tonight. Can you bring the new video dumps over so I can see them, too?”

“Sure, I just got them this afternoon and haven’t even had a chance to look myself. Trying to keep up with everything while Paulie plays hooky isn’t easy.”

“I bet. If you need some calls done or whatever, bring that too. I can take care of it tomorrow from here.”

“Sounds good. See you in a couple of hours.” Joey disconnected the call and Jamie leaned back, then frowned.

“Has that white truck been following us long?” Jamie asked.

Mike turned around and stared. “Yeah, looks like the same truck that was behind us when we left my house.”

“I don’t remember seeing it at the store, but then again, I wasn’t looking,” Jamie said.

“Try and lose them,” Mike said.

“My plan exactly,” Jamie replied and as the light changed, he turned right without signaling, then took the first left and sped down the side street. Another left, a rolling stop, and he pulled out into traffic once more and headed right – back onto the street he had originally been on. Jamie drove straight through the next light, then pulled into a busy store lot and around the back of the building. He stopped his car so it would face out to the street from the side of the building and under some overhanging trees. From here, he could watch the traffic and see if the truck showed up again.

“There it is,” Mike said and pointed to the truck stopped at the light just before the store lot entrance.

Jamie slowly backed the car up so the shadows hid it even more – then watched the truck pull into the lot, do a loop around, then head back out and turn to the right.

“Head out the back of the store lot and take the beach road. That way, you come in behind your place and can cut in through the driveway gate in back,” Mike said.

“I never use that gate. I don’t even think it will open,” Jamie said.

“Mr. Garibaldi used it two days ago to unload some pipe into the basement. It works.”

“Huh, okay. I’ll give it a shot. They probably already know where I live, but I’m not going to make it easy on them.”

It took an extra half hour, but Mike had been correct about the back gate and Jamie pulled his car in and shut the gate behind him. Two other cars were parked in front of his, so it would mean some risky maneuvers to see it from the street.

“This should slow them down. Of course, the minute you turn a light on, they’ll know you’re home,” Mike said.

“I won’t care once I’m inside. They can try and come at me in my place and they’ll lose every time,” Jamie said as he grabbed his bag from the office and the

two bags of groceries.

“I’ll watch your back,” Mike said as Jamie headed inside. Once he got up the stairs, he set the grocery bags down and pulled out his keys.

“Jamie, wait,” Mike said and slipped through the door. He stuck his head back out through the wood. “It’s clear now – but someone was here. You might want to put on a glove before you open the door.”

“Well, shit,” Jamie sighed and pulled a latex glove out of his pocket. One side benefit of the job, he always had a couple of the blue gloves in a pocket just in case. He used his fingertips to turn the knob – and the door opened without needing a key. He carried the groceries inside and pushed the door shut behind him, then set the bags on the kitchen floor.

The kitchen wasn’t too bad. A few things had been pulled out of the freezer and left on the floor, but there were no smashed dishes. The living room had every book and magazine dumped on the floor, the cushions in the couch were slashed, the recliner had been slashed and the trunk coffee table was open and tipped over. A brass and glass award he’d been given was embedded in the center of his flat-screen TV, and the two lamps were smashed in the middle of the floor. The table and chairs in the corner were dumped over and broken, and the papers he’d left piled up on the table were scattered. The bathroom cabinet was emptied into the sink, but nothing worse in there. The bedroom was covered in shreds of foam from the slashed mattress, and every item of clothing in his drawers and closet were slashed or torn.

“I don’t know what they were looking for, but I can guess – and I had it with me the whole time,” Jamie said.

“You need to call this in,” Mike reminded him. “Take the groceries and your bag and go lock them in your trunk. Come back up, call this in, then get a room at the suite hotel where they’ve got a kitchen. Insurance will cover this – and the

clean up crew to fix what they can for you. You know the crime scene techs are going to need a day or two to work this.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Let me go lock stuff up, and I’ll call Joey after I call this in,” Jamie said.

He took the groceries and his bag back down to the car, put the office bag under a few things in the trunk, then the groceries in front to help hide it. “Mike, stay here and watch this, okay? Come get me if someone tries to mess with it.”

“You got it, Jamie,” Mike replied and sat cross-legged on the roof of the car.

Jamie went back upstairs, called in the break-in, then called Joey. “I think we’re going to have to change our plans tonight. My place got tossed. I just called it in, but I need to wait for them to show up. Then I’m going to get a room at the hotel suites place.”

“No, you’re not getting a room. I’ve got a guest room, you can stay with me.”

“You don’t want me bringing my trouble to your door, Joey.”

“What trouble? If they think you have something important, they probably think I have it, too. You can help me protect my place. Just get them started, then come here. Bring the beer.”

Jamie chuckled. “Yes, boss. Beer and sandwich fixings are locked in my car. I’ll probably be about an hour, but I’ll be there. Thank you.”

It took less than thirty minutes for the patrol to show up and secure the scene. Jamie left the keys with the crime scene tech and told them to lock it up and leave the keys in his office at the station where he’d get them later. They told him it would take forty-eight hours to catalog the whole scene and he waved as he left. Mike slid inside the car while Jamie started it up and backed out of the gate, got out and closed the gate once more, then headed up the street to Joey’s place.

“I’m sorry about your stuff, Jamie,” Mike said.

“Yeah, I am, too. I took a bunch of photos to send to my insurance guy. They can cut me a check and I can replace most everything. It’s just one more thing to be cranky about.”

“Or be glad you’re not living with Elise and the kids. Imagine what would have happened if they did that in the house where your family lived.”

“Nope, not going down that road. It’s been long enough that anyone watching me knows I don’t go to Elise’s place, nor does she come to mine. She should be fine, but I asked the patrol cop to get a radio car to sit on her neighborhood for a few days to make sure they’re safe.”

“What about Katie?” Mike asked.

“They’ve had someone watching her place since you died,” Jamie said. “At least, that’s what Sarge told everyone. You know that’s standard practice when a cop is killed and it’s not instantly solved.”

“Oh, right. I forgot about that,” Mike said.

Jamie pulled into Joey’s driveway and before he could shut off the car, one of the garage door bays opened and Joey waved him inside. He pulled the car in and shut it off while Joey closed the bay door. “No point in advertising you’re here,” Joey said.

“Good idea,” Jamie replied as he got out. He pulled out the bags of groceries, then dug out the bag from the office and shoved it into the duffel he kept in the trunk with spare clothes and gear.

Joe picked up the grocery bags while Jamie locked the car and followed him inside.

Joe’s house was in a cul-de-sac of homes built in the 1970’s. He’d grown up here, and when his parents died, he had inherited their four bedroom colonial-style home.

“You finished the kitchen?” Jamie asked as they stepped into a modern granite and chrome masterpiece with glossy white cabinets on top and polished cherry

finish on the bottom. “It’s fantastic, man. Good job.”

“Yeah, got the last of it done about a month ago. My cousin Manny came over and helped me do the countertops and the last of the cabinet work.”

“Where are we going to be working?” Jamie asked. “My laptop and everything are in my bag here.”

“I turned the dining room into an office and library, so go ahead and put it in there. No need for a dining room when I’ve got this space opened up enough for a table and chairs.”

Jamie walked in the direction Joey had pointed and found a room lined with bookcases and more built-in cabinetry, a gas fireplace with an antique mantel surround and a flat screen mounted over it, a desk built in under one window and a table with four leather chairs around it that could serve as a game place or work space. Right now, it had Joey’s laptop and a few file folders spread out on the polished surface. On the floor, a red Persian style rug protected gleaming wide plank floors.

“Joey, this room is fantastic. You’re really turning this house into a showplace,” Jamie said, then headed back through the arch into the kitchen.

“I figure I don’t have a mortgage, so I can afford to really invest in making this what I want. I’ve only got me to please, so I can take as long as I need to get it right.”

Joey had laid out the sandwich fixings on the island so they both got to work building their subs. Crusty long rolls sliced part way through and pulled open, then slathered with mayo or mustard, layered with lunch meats and cheese, tomato, lettuce, pickles, peppers, and a quick squirt of oil and vinegar with herbs.

Joey picked up his plate and a beer, and headed into the study.

“You sure you’re okay with us bringing food in there?” Jamie asked.

“Yep. The rug is one of those machine washable ones over waterproof padding and all of the wood is protected. Just wipe it up and it’s all good. Come on, it’s going to take a minute or two to get these files loaded on your machine.”

They ate in silence while the files copied from the thumb drive onto Jamie’s machine, then Joey sighed. “I feel guilty that your place got tossed. I saw a notice that there had been an anonymous call to the tip line that you were being watched. I figured you already knew you were targeted, so why bother you with someone looking for drama. Maybe if I’d let you know...”

“No, Joey. I knew I was on Carrera’s hit list. I should have had someone watch my place, but I didn’t. I didn’t lose anything important – I had all of that with me.”

“Your insurance going to cover the damage?”

“Most of it, I think. I took a bunch of photos and sent it with a claim form. We’ll see. I did have something I wanted to ask you, though,” Jamie said.

“What’s that?”

“Did you know Paulie was over at Mike’s place, doing handyman stuff for Katie?”

Joey stopped mid-chew, then finished his mouthful and took a swallow of beer. “Maybe?”

“Maybe what, Joey? Come on, don’t dick around about this. I saw him go into her house today without knocking – which means he’s pretty familiar with the place. I saw a toolbox inside, so I guessed he might be helping her out. But you said he had taken personal time off for some family issues. What’s the story?”

Joey put the sandwich down and leaned back with his beer. “I think Paulie has a thing for Katie. I think it’s been going on for a while.”

“Oh, hell no,” Jamie said.

A loud crash came from the kitchen. Both men pulled out guns – Jamie from his ankle holster and Joey from under the table, before they headed towards the

noise.

Mike jumped in front of Jamie once Joey had moved ahead and it took every ounce of Jamie's control to not shoot the ghost. "What the fuck?" he hissed at Mike.

"Find out more about that fucker, Paulie. I'm gonna kill him. Watch yer own backs tonight, I'm going back to my house and see what my wife is doing now that I'm out of the way."

"Mike, wait..." Jamie said but the ghost was gone.

"Who are you talking to?" Joey asked as he came back into the study.

"Myself. I thought I saw something through the window, but it was a weird reflection."

"The noise was a baking sheet I'd left on the edge of the counter. It was on the floor when I went to check. No one's here but us two, and I don't have any pets, so I'm not sure how it fell off the counter, but it did."

"You checked the doors?" Jamie asked.

"Yeah, locked up tight and deadbolts secured. No windows are open because I have the climate system running."

"Weird. Okay, so we were talking about Paulie and Katie," Jamie said as he sat back down and tucked his gun away.

"I don't know if she ever reciprocated, but Paulie talked about her more than any man should about another man's wife."

"Thanks for telling me," Jamie said. He put half of his sandwich aside and tapped the key to bring up the video files folder. "They're all done," he said and pulled the thumb drive out. "Start with number one and go every other like we did last time?"

"Works for me. Once we see which way the van went, we can focus on the files from that direction. Got feeds from three doorbell cameras and two ATM machines, so maybe one of them has a glimpse, too."

They watched videos in silence for a while, until Joey called out, “I got a van on this one, I think it’s the same one.”

“I’ve got a van on this one, too – but it’s going in the wrong direction,” Jamie said.

“Mark it and keep going. I think we might have both of the vans in these clips,” Joey said.

An hour later and they had confirmation of the second van coming from the left to follow the first van as it pulled out of the store parking lot – and both vans disappeared somewhere after the ATM footage caught them about two miles down the road.

“So how do you want to handle our next move?” Joey asked.

“We go fishing,” Jamie replied as he pulled up a map. “We lose sight of it here. There are four roads they could have taken off of this one. My guess is they’d go somewhere like an old warehouse or garage – maybe a storage unit. That eliminates one road that ends in a cul-de-sac and is only residential. Now we need to see if there are any doorbell cameras or business security cameras on these three streets – and on the two cross streets on two of them. If we had a real tracking system, we could use the red light cameras and so on, but that’s still being implemented in Harbor.”

“Of course it is,” Joe sighed and shut down his computer. “Okay, I’ll take a cruise around those streets tomorrow and see if I can find more cameras. You? You’ll stay here. CSI said they’d take at least forty-eight hours, right? So you hang here, watch TV, play video games, read, whatever. Just don’t stare out the windows and don’t open the garage.”

“I know the drill, man. I appreciate you giving me a place to hide out. I wasn’t looking forward to staying in a hotel and possibly putting innocents at risk.”

“There’s a work out room in the basement you can use if you want to run or bike or whatever. I know you used to go for runs and you’re probably missing it.”

“Yeah, I have had to stop myself three or four times from going for a run. I might do that first thing in the morning. Help me get my head clear.”

“For now? How about the game from earlier today on my wide-screen TV, some more beer and snacks,” Joe said.

“Sounds like heaven,” Jamie replied and shut down his own computer. “Can I grab a shower and change first?”

“You bet. Upstairs, turn left, second door is the guest suite. Has a bathroom attached. I’ll clean up the sandwich stuff and get some popcorn going.”

Twenty minutes later, Jamie came down the stairs in sweatpants, a t-shirt, and socks. “Thanks for this. That shower is amazing. How many heads are there? I think I counted five.”

“Six, actually,” Joe said. “So, it’s the Sox versus the Yankees. I didn’t even check to see who won, so we can both be surprised.”

They settled into a couple of plush leather recliners with cup holders in the arms and a table between them. “I’m going to have to replace my couch with something like this,” Jamie said.

“This was one of the first things I bought for myself when I started updating everything. I can send you the link to the furniture store so you can order one for yourself,” Joe replied.

They settled in to enjoy the game, cheering and cursing when required. Just before the game was over, Mike stormed into the room, furious. “That asshole is putting the moves on my wife.”

“Gotta piss, be right back,” Jamie said to Joe, so Joe paused the game and Jamie headed into the bathroom.

“I can’t talk to you right now. Wait until we go to bed. Game’s almost over, okay?” Jamie whispered as he used the facilities, then let the water run in the sink to hide his voice.

Mike spoke from outside the door. “I want to beat the shit out of that jack-off.”

“I get it, but I can’t talk about it with you right now. Watch the game or go hang out in the guest room, but no more talking until we’re in private. Got it?”

“Got it,” Mike grumbled.

Jamie came out and found his way back to the recliner and his beer. “Sorry about that. Let’s watch the Sox clobber these yahoos.”

They cheered at the end of the game, then Jamie helped Joe clean up the bottles and bowls before he headed up to bed, bringing his laptop and bag with him.

Once in the guest room, he locked the door, then set his phone on the dock and got some music playing. “That should hide our voices as long as I keep mine to a near whisper,” Jamie said.

“I watched them for like three hours. She *encouraged* him, Jamie. She finally said ‘what would people think if you stayed over? I’ve not even been a widow for a week’ – and that’s when he left.”

“Joey said he’s had a thing for Katie for a while. He said that Paulie talked about her more than any man should talk about another man’s wife. It made Joey uncomfortable. He doesn’t think they’ve actually acted on anything, though.”

“I don’t know, man. I think they might have. I don’t know how to deal with this. Do you need anything from me right now?” Mike asked.

“Want to go look for cameras? I can show you on the map where we need some scouting.”

“Sure, give me something productive to do.”

Jamie showed Mike the streets they had narrowed it down to, and he turned to slide through the wall. Just before he left, Jamie spoke. “Mike, I’m sorry about what you saw. I do appreciate all you’re doing to help us solve your murder, though. Hang in there, my friend.”

“Thanks, Jamie. I’m glad I’m not alone out here. I’m glad you, at least, can see and hear me. Some of these guys? They don’t have anyone. I think I’d already be crazy if that were the case. I’ll come back after Joe goes to work. G’night.”

“Goodnight,” Jamie replied.

Chapter Seven

It had been four days since Mike had been murdered, and the department had finally agreed to release the body for burial. Doherty's Funeral Home picked up the body at the coroner's office and took it back to be cremated. Katie had picked out a tasteful urn that would sit on a table beside a couple of photos of Mike and a shadow box with his badge and medals pinned inside next to a uniform patch for the Harbor Police Department. The funeral was scheduled for three days from today, on Saturday afternoon. The Chief sent out an email to the whole department with a reminder to be in full dress blues for the event.

That meant Jamie would have to swing by the station and pick his uniform up before then. He'd awakened at Joe's house, pulled on sweats and a t-shirt, found his sneakers, and headed downstairs. Joe had left a note telling him where the coffee could be found, but instead of making breakfast, he found his way into the basement workout space. There was a stationary bike, a treadmill, a rowing machine, and one of those mirror strength training things. A mini fridge held bottles of water and sports drinks, and a bathroom with a shower completed the setup. Earbuds in, music cranked, Jamie started to run. This was one of those fancy treadmills with the huge screen that showed a beach run, a forest trail, a mountain path, a city street, or whatever else you wanted to run on. The angle of

the base would go up or down to match the video, and Jamie let himself get lost in a nice run through a forest. Five miles later, he walked to a stop and found himself a bottle of water in the mini fridge.

After a shower, Jamie put in a small load of laundry, and made himself some coffee and food.

He settled at the table in the study once more, and pulled out his laptop and files. He might as well do some work because otherwise, he was going to go stir crazy. In between handling administrative case work, Jamie fielded calls from the Sarge, the CSI team in his apartment, and his insurance company. The good news was, insurance would cover everything, minus his two hundred dollar deductible. The bad news was that CSI didn't find any fingerprints that they didn't expect to find. Whomever had trashed his place, wore gloves and a hat. No hair, fingerprints, or DNA could be found that didn't belong to him, or the short list of people that had ever been in his place.

Sarge had asked where he had stayed last night, and he told him he was hiding out at Joey's place. Sarge then suggested that he stay at Joey's until the funeral. They were going to have several undercover photographers taking pictures so they could see if the killer might be in the crowd. It was a common thing for murderers to want to witness, first hand, the pain they caused the loved ones of their victim. Even more so when it was a cop and the other cops suffered.

"I'll ask Joe if it's okay, Sarge," Jamie said.

"I already asked him. He said he's fine with it. I also had him set up a post office box in your name so you could get your mail and packages delivered somewhere we can watch." Sarge said.

"Why do I have to worry about that? What did I miss?"

"Your neighbor called about a box that got left in the hallway outside your door sometime last night. CSI found it this morning after the neighbor called, and called in the bomb squad. It had two pipe bombs on a mercury switch inside. If

the box had been shifted, picked up, tipped, the switch would've triggered and it would have leveled that place."

"My gods," Jamie breathed. "You got guys at my ex's place, right?"

"Yeah, I doubled the patrols for Elise and for Katie. Elise said that after the funeral, she's taking all four kids to Florida on vacation to get them out of the area for a while."

"Probably a good idea. Thanks for keeping an eye on things, Sarge. I'm sorry this is such a mess."

"Jameson Kennedy, you did not ask for this, nor did Mikey. Keep your head down and stay alive. I'll take care of everything else."

"Appreciate it, Sarge. Thank you again."

The call disconnected and Jamie put the phone down, then noticed his hands were shaking. "A fucking bomb, outside my door. My gods."

"What?" Mike asked.

"Bomb squad defused a bomb that had been put outside my apartment door, in the hallway. Two pipe bombs on a mercury switch. Sarge wants me to stay here until after your funeral, and he's doubled up the patrols on Katie and Elise's places."

"When's the funeral?" Mike asked.

"Saturday afternoon. From what I've heard, Katie already had your body cremated."

"And I'm still here – and I didn't feel anything, so that's good," Mike said. "I did find a few more cameras. I went all the way out to Shoreline Drive, so pull up a map and I'll list them for you."

Jamie marked the spots where Mike said he'd found cameras, then sent the map to Joey.

Joey emailed back with, "How did you find these?"

Jamie replied in a chat message, “Street view and weather cams. Just check them out. And no, I haven’t left the house. I’m going to order some clothes and have them delivered to that post office box Sarge said you set up for me. Could you get my dress blues out of the closet in my office? My cover and gloves are in the box on the shelf above the hanger.”

“Yep. No problem. And you could just order stuff, have it delivered to me at my place, in my name. I think the post office box is a pain in the ass, to be honest,” Joe messaged back.

“Sounds good. Thanks, Joe. See you tonight.”



Jamie ordered a few things to replace his destroyed wardrobe, and the insurance company went to his apartment and removed all of the damaged items, then cleaned, repaired, and repainted the whole suite.

He spent the days going over case files, making notes, entering data into the HPD system, and nights were spent looking through the canvass statements and video dumps.

Mike would hang around during the day and talk over the cases with him, but at night, he’d go wandering. He spent a lot of time at Elise’s place, just watching his kids. Maureen and Kevin were good kids, but seemed to be really struggling with the loss of their dad. Having them spend time with Elise and Jamie’s kids, Colleen and Eddie, helped keep them from just sitting around, being depressed. The girls were the same age while Eddie was a year older than Kevin, and they all attended St. Agatha’s School together.

Jamie felt the frustration of how long it was taking to get anywhere on this case, and Mike’s concern that he’d disappear after the funeral made him even more

aware of how fast time was passing.

“I think the vans hid in that old warehouse on Barrens Way. We don’t see anything beyond it and the last shot is before it. No other location makes sense for a place to hide two vans,” Jamie said as he and Joe shared a pizza.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you. They found the burned-out kill van on Pilgrim Beach, just over the seawall from the parking lot. Seems they pushed it onto the beach, then lit it up. That cove is well hidden, so it wasn’t until the gas tank exploded that anyone noticed. Fire department put out the fire and HPD had the wreckage towed to the impound lot so CSI could go over it this morning.”

“Yeah, we called that, didn’t we?” Jamie replied.

“Yep, we did. They’ve had a BOLO out on Dominick Carrera since they found the van. It’s still not enough evidence, but if they can talk to him and trip him up, they can get a warrant to search his place. The facial recognition didn’t definitively prove it was Nicky Carrera in the grocery store parking lot. Only a thirty-eight percent match.”

“But we know it’s him, don’t we?” Jamie asked.

“I know it. You know it. Hell, even Sarge knows it – but Dumb and Dumber refuse to point to Carrera as anyone with a motive. They say the case was too long ago for it to be tied to Mike’s death.”

“But didn’t Tony get roughed up at the State Penitentiary two weeks ago? Put him in the hospital for a few days? That’s a recent enough motive. Tony Carrera gets nearly killed, Nicky goes after the cops that put Tony away. It’s pretty clear to me.”

“And to me, but those two refuse to call it,” Joey said.

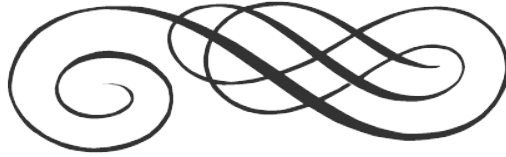
Jamie dropped his half-eaten slice on his plate and sighed. “I wanted to have this solved before the funeral. That’s not going to happen at this rate.”

“We’ve got one more day before the funeral. We could always use you as bait, if you were game. Put you in a vest and pick up a couple of pieces of furniture to

move into your place.”

“I’d thought about that, too. Let’s do it. Sitting around is making me crazy,” Jamie said.

“Okay, let’s plot this all out,” Joey said, and pulled out a notebook and pen.



The next morning, Jamie pulled on the body armor, then a t-shirt, his shoulder holster, and covered it all with an unbuttoned flannel shirt. He got into his car and followed Joey in his truck to get breakfast at a diner in the neighborhood the Carreras frequented. They sat in a booth in the back, Jamie with his back to the wall so he could see the whole room while Joe kept an eye on the traffic outside the window at their table.

“I think Saul Mizzotta just spotted us,” Joe said.

“Nicky’s right hand man? Good. That means the plan’s gonna work. I’m still finishing my breakfast, though,” Jamie said.

“I got a text from Bennett’s Furniture. They have the double recliner on the loading dock for us, so we just have to go through the back and show our ID, then we can get help loading it onto my truck.”

“I’d rather we did it ourselves, without help. Fewer targets for the Carrera gang that way.”

“Yeah, good point. If they even let us get there,” Joe said.

“We’ll get that, then stop at the warehouse store and pick up the table, chairs, and TV. I can fit the TV and table in my car with the back seats down,” Jamie replied as he poured ketchup over his hash browns.

“You didn’t have to poison your fried potatoes. I wouldn’t have taken them anyway,” Joe teased as he watched Jamie eat.

“Putting ketchup on hash browns isn’t poisoning them. You put it on your french fries, right?”

“Yeah, but it doesn’t get on my scrambled eggs that way, either.”

“It’s good this way, you should try it.”

“Nope,” Joe said. “I’m fine without it.” He leaned back as the server refilled their coffee, and waited to speak until she left. “Now Saul is standing outside his car, talking to another car full of people. They’ve pointed this way twice.” A swallow of coffee and he looked back at Jamie. “How could they have survived this long? Either they’re incompetent or arrogant.”

“We’re on their home turf,” Jamie said. “They’re arrogant. If they were incompetent, they wouldn’t have grabbed Mike.”

“Good point. Doesn’t look like they’re in any rush to come inside, so let’s just eat and make them wait.”

“Probably not interested in shooting up their favorite breakfast spot,” Jamie said.

“The food is pretty good here,” Joe said. “If it wasn’t on the other side of the city from where I’m usually at, I’d be a regular here, too.”

Mike appeared at the end of the table. “Jamie, they put a tracker on your car. Not a bomb, just a tracking box.”

Jamie looked over towards Mike and gave a faint nod.

“I’ve been listening to them. They’re waiting to hear if they should try and separate you and Joe or just take you both out,” Mike said.

“Hey, Joe. How about I head out first, then you can come up behind them and we’ll have a better idea of what they might try?” Jamie asked.

“That’s not a bad idea. Call me when you pull out of the lot and we can leave the phones on the bluetooth speaker so as to coordinate better.”

“I’ll go pay,” Jamie said and finished his coffee. “Be careful, my friend.”

“Always, my friend,” Joe replied.

Once he was outside, Jamie ducked his head and asked Mike, “Where’s the tracker?”

“Front driver’s side wheel well,” Mike said.

“That’s stupid of them,” Jamie replied as he crouched down to re-tie a shoe, then pulled the magnetic tracker box off and dropped it behind the tire. That way, when he backed out, he’d crush it and it would look like the magnet had failed.

“Not like that’s going to slow them down much, but I’d rather they weren’t tracking me back to Joe’s place.”

He got into his car and spoke again. “Remember, I’ll be on speaker. I can mute it and answer you if I have to – but if I forget to mute or the mute doesn’t click over, we’re in trouble. I’d rather you rode in Saul’s car and then let me know what their plan is as we go along.”

“I can do that,” Mike said. “I’ll pop in if there’s a problem.”

“Thanks, Mike,” Jamie said and started it up, then dialed Joe.

“I’m pulling out of the lot now, Joe. Drop the tip and let’s go.”

“Already done. In my car, cleaning it up a little to stall for time,” Joe replied.

“I can see two cars behind me, spaced out with a car in between each. That silver Nissan and the black Taurus. Got ‘em?”

“Yep, got them. Remember, we need to go around to the back of the furniture store. That’s probably where they’ll try it, because there will be less witnesses. If they don’t try it there, they’ll wait until we get back to your place.”

“I agree. Okay, we’re almost at the store. Heading around the back.”

The cars split up and one followed Jamie, the other went around the other side of the lot. Jamie pulled all the way to the far side of the lot, then followed the truck delivery road around to the back to the loading dock. He parked off to the side and waited.

“I’m here,” Jamie said into the phone. “Hanging up now.”

Mike popped into the passenger's seat and shook his head. "They're really hungry to take you out. They don't want to hit Joe, but they will if he gets in the way. I heard Saul say that it looked like you were picking up furniture, so they could wait until your hands were full, then shoot."

"That's what I figured they'd do," Jamie said. "Okay, gonna head inside now that Joe's here."

Jamie went into the store with Joe right behind him. They signed out the boxed up piece of furniture and the dock manager walked them over to the box, checked it off his list, and backed away when they said they didn't want help. Joe backed his pickup to the correct loading dock and left it running while they slid the box off the dock and into the bed.

The first shot went through the top of the box, and Jamie yelled, "Everyone, get down!"

Joe hit the button on his cell phone and called it in. He quickly explained two off duty officers were under fire, then described the two cars Saul and his buddies were in. Ducked down behind the side of the pickup, he yelled into his cell phone while Jamie got behind the pickup and took shots at Saul and his men. One of the guys in Saul's car took a bullet and Saul dragged him into the front passenger's seat, then pulled away, leaving the scene. Four men were left with the other car, but their interest in taking out Jamie waned when Saul left – and then even more when three police cruisers pulled up.

Cops rolled out of their cars and ducked behind their doors, guns pointed at the remaining four shooters. It didn't take long before all four were cuffed and shoved into the back seats of the cruisers.

"How'd you two end up in this mess?" Sarge asked. He'd pulled up just after the four were arrested to tell them that Saul had disappeared. They had alerts out at the hospitals for a gunshot victim, but nothing to report yet.

“We knew Carrera wanted to take me out. I have no furniture left in my place, so we both wore vests and decided to try and mitigate any possible damage to innocents by loading up the furniture ourselves,” Jamie said.

“So you used yourself as bait and tried to take them out before they could take you out,” Sarge said.

“Something like that. Look, I *am* going to Mike’s funeral tomorrow. Now I can go and know that they’ll be thinking twice about coming after me,” Jamie replied.

“You could’ve trusted that I had taken all of that into consideration,” Sarge said.

“I’m not going to let one of mine get taken out at his partner’s funeral. I’ve got three teams that will be watching the crowd, snipers on the rooftops near the church, the cemetery, and at the reception hall afterwards. Wear your body armor under your dress blues and keep your head down. Got it?”

“Got it,” Jamie replied.

“Looks like your new couch got a bullet hole,” Sarge said as he looked over the box in the back of Joe’s pickup.

“I’m hoping it’s just the box and not the leather padding underneath,” Jamie said. He climbed up on the back of the truck and pulled at the hole in the cardboard to make it bigger. “Yeah, just the box and the foam. Went right through. The furniture is fine.”

“Good thing. I don’t think your insurance company will cover yet another couch,” Sarge said. “How about you two get out of here now? I’ll expect your reports on my desk Monday morning.”

Jamie gave Sarge a nod and got into his car while Joey closed up the tailgate and moved out to follow him. They stopped at the warehouse store and picked up the last few things, then headed to Jamie’s house. A second floor walk-up sucked for moving things, but at least it was a straight run up the stairs to his door. They unwrapped the pieces outside and carried them up to the apartment without any

further trouble. Jamie had paid extra to get a better lock system put on the door and a security system installed. A new mattress had been delivered, but the bed frame wouldn't arrive until early next week, so he'd be sleeping on the floor for a few days. Just not tonight. Tonight, they opened up the mattress to let it expand and air out, locked up the place and set the alarm.

"Chinese food tonight?" Joey asked.

"Yeah, sounds good. The adrenaline rush is gone and right now I want food, booze, and sleep."

"Same here. I'll pick it up and meet you at the house."

"See you there," Jamie replied.

Chapter Eight

The morning of the funeral dawned bright and clear. As members of the honor guard, Jamie and Joe had to be at the church a couple of hours before the service started. Body armor under full dress blues was enough to make anyone sweat. Add standing at attention, in the sun, on the church steps, while people filed past them to go inside, and it was a whole different level of hell.

Sarge shifted them to inside by the altar once the family arrived, where they stood at parade rest during the service. Jamie stared at a fragment of the stained glass window across from his position and did his best to remain stoic. It became increasingly difficult as Mike wandered around the church, his worry at this being his last chance to see his family before his burial – when he assumed he would disappear from this plane – growing by the minute.

“Jamie, you’ve got to tell them how much I love them. That I’ll always be with them, even if they can’t see me. You need to make sure they understand I didn’t want this. My Da, he has to know I’ve always admired him and did my best to be as good a cop as he had been. Tell them, Jamie. Please, let me know you’ll tell them.”

Jamie whispered and his lips barely moved. “I will.”

The service ended and the six man honor guard moved to stand on either side of the man from the funeral home who carried the urn in gloved hands out to the hearse. Flowers were loaded in around it and the cars loaded up to make the short trip across the street and through the cemetery to the burial plot. The six guards walked alongside the hearse until it stopped, then took up positions behind the headstone while the priest stood near the grave site and people were kept back until the flowers, flag, and urn had been arranged properly. The family was seated, then the rest were allowed to join them.

Jamie bowed his head and whispered, "I'm gonna miss you, Mikey."

"I'm gonna miss you, too. I don't know how this works. I'm thinking once the priest is done, I'll probably disappear," Mike said.

Elise sat beside Katie and held her hand while the four kids all sat together and the girls hugged each other. When the honor guard folded the flag, it ended up in Jamie's hands. He turned, walked over to Katie, got on one knee and presented her the flag.

Katie accepted it between flattened palms, then leaned over and whispered to Jamie, "I wish you had been the one that died."

Elise sucked in a breath and leaned away from Katie, shocked and appalled.

Jamie gave her a wry smile and whispered back, "I do, too." Then he rose to his feet, saluted her, and returned to his position.

Father Cullity spoke the final words. "The Lord bless him and keep him, the Lord make his face to shine upon him and be gracious to him, the Lord lift up his countenance upon him and give him peace." Then the priest turned to the congregation and spoke, "May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Katie got to her feet, the flag hugged to her with one arm, and laid a rose by the urn, then turned and walked away. The kids and Elise followed, then Mike's father, and others who had flowers to lay on the grave. Elise made sure the kids

and Katie got into the funeral car, and held the door for Mike's father to join them. People started to walk back to the church function hall for the reception while the car drove the family across the street.

Jamie put his hat and gloves in Joe's car, loosened a button at his collar, and accepted a cigarette from Joe.

"I know you don't smoke normally, but I think today is an exception," Joe said and lit them both up. "So, what did Katie say to you when you presented the flag?"

"She said she wished it was me that had been killed. I told her that I did, too."

"That's a pretty nasty thing to say," Joe said.

"Eh, she's grieving. Pain and anger make people say shitty things."

"Even still," Joe shook his head.

"I know. Elise was pretty upset. I'll wait for the rush to die down, then go speak to her," Jamie said.

"To Katie? Or to Elise?"

"Elise," Jamie replied. "I need to find out when she's headed to Florida with the kids."

"I'll come find you in about an hour so we can get out of here," Joe said. "Those sniper guys are gonna be sick of watching us by then."

"Gotcha. Thanks, Joe." Jamie crushed out the cigarette and headed inside. He got a plate of food and went to stand near Elise. "Mind if I join you for a minute?"

"Of course not," Elise said. "Are you okay?"

"Not really, but I will be," Jamie replied. "I wanted to check with you to find out when you're headed out with the kids."

"Tomorrow morning. Suitcases are already packed, school records forwarded. I rented a place in the Keys where we'll have sun and surf, quiet, and good schools. I'll send you the address once we get settled," Elise said.

“Is Katie going to come stay at all?”

“No. She can barely take care of herself, never mind the kids. She hasn’t even asked where we’re staying or anything,” Elise kept her voice to a whisper. “I’m trying to keep the kids from noticing, but they’re not stupid. Colleen asked me if you died would I pretend they had died too, like Auntie Katie.”

“Ouch, that’s rough,” Jamie said. They both fell silent, eating the potato salad, pasta with meatballs, and whatever the green stuff was that had cheese and tomatoes in it.

“You can come visit if you get some time off,” Elise said.

“I appreciate that. Once we get this case figured out, I may do that. I’m glad you’re taking them away from all of this, Elise. It’ll be safer for them, too.” Jamie leaned over and kissed her cheek, then got to his feet and dumped his plate. He took a minute to hug his kids and told them to be good for their Mom, then hugged Mike’s kids. “Your Dad would be so proud of you guys. Be good for your Aunt Elise, okay?”

Maureen and Kevin both nodded, then Jamie gave Elise a little wave and headed for the door. He waited for Joe to come find him, and they stepped outside.

“You two headed out?” Sarge asked.

“Yes, sir. Going to Joe’s place to pick up my car, then I’ll be going back to my apartment,” Jamie said.

“Okay. Stay alert. I’m keeping the team on the reception until the families are safely away. In fact, I’m going to be driving Elise and the kids to the airport tomorrow, so don’t worry about them,” Sarge said.

“Thanks, Sarge. I appreciate everything you’re doing,” Jamie said.

“I know you do,” Sarge replied with a quiet smile, then he headed back inside.



It felt good to be back in his own place. Jamie had stopped at one of those grocery-plus-everything-else stores and picked up supplies and a few things for the apartment. Towels, sheets, a comforter, some pillows - they had all needed to be replaced.

He put a frozen lasagna into the oven, grabbed a beer from the fridge, and relaxed into his new recliner sofa. He turned the TV on to a show he sometimes watched, and Jamie let himself relax. He hadn't seen or heard from Mike since the flag ceremony, so he assumed his friend had been correct, and he was now gone.

"Sorry we didn't get it solved before you went for good, Mikey," Jamie said to the empty room. When nobody spoke back, he felt that punch in the chest feeling he'd had when he first saw Mike's body. Jamie would deny it to his own dying day, but he shed a few tears for his friend right then.

He got up and put the lasagna on a plate, then went back to the recliner to eat. The evening news came on and Jamie half-watched to see what else had gone on today. They had a segment on the funeral, with a brief interview with Katie.

"My husband should never have been killed. It was his partner, Jameson Kennedy, who should have been the one to die. Mike was a good man, a good cop, while Jamie is crooked and should be investigated," Katie said.

"What the hell?" Jamie said as he stared at the screen. He put his plate and his beer down when his phone rang. "Yeah?"

"Don't worry, Kennedy. We'll fix that mistake," the mechanical voice said.

"What mistake? Who is this?" Jamie asked. He didn't recognize the number.

"We got Donovan, and now we're gonna get you. Doesn't matter where you hide, or what kind of security you think you have. You can't stay in your apartment forever."

The call disconnected, and Jamie pulled up a number and hit dial. “Clemens, I need you to find out where the last call that just came into this phone came from.”

“One sec, Kennedy,” Clemens said.

Jamie knew Clemens was the best tech in the department. If anyone could track it, he could. The guy worked from a home office since a stray bullet put him in a wheelchair. The department paid for him to attend college and now he paid them back with his skills.

“I’ve got a number and a location,” Clemens said.

“Send it to whomever is on call. I was just threatened and told that they got Donovan and now they were coming after me,” Jamie said.

“You’ve got it. Stay safe, Kennedy.”

“Will do, thanks, Clemens.” He disconnected the call and tossed his phone to the side. This would be a more than one beer night, that’s for sure.

Chapter Nine

Sleeping on a good mattress on the floor would never be as good as sleeping on a good mattress on a bed frame. Even with all of the beer, it had taken him too long to fall asleep. Jamie fumbled for his phone, and finally answered it the second time it started ringing.

“Dammit, Kennedy, get up. They just found Nicky Carrera’s body on Donovan’s front lawn.”

Jamie sat up, looked at the phone to see it was Joey calling him, then groaned at the time. “Who’s taking this one?”

“Haggerty and Jones. They said I could go take a look, since it’s obviously tied to Mike’s case. Go shower and put on the coffee. I’ll bring breakfast when I come over after I’ve checked it out,” Joey said.

“Yeah. Okay. An hour?”

“Say two. And don’t go back to sleep. I’m not going to stand around your hallway being a target.”

The call disconnected, and Jamie set the alarm on his phone to wake him in an hour – then dropped back onto the mattress and fell asleep.

By the time Joey showed up, he had showered, shaved, and was on his second cup of coffee. He let Joey in, then locked it all up again before he followed Joe

into the kitchen.

“Okay, tell me,” Jamie said. “Start with where the hell were the cops that were supposed to be sitting on Katie’s place?”

“Sarge pulled them after the funeral. As for Carrera? He’d been laid out, spread-eagle, on the Donovan’s front lawn. His throat was cut and his junk was cut off and shoved into his mouth,” Joey said.

“That doesn’t sound like a mob hit,” Jamie said as he grabbed a mug for Joe and the coffee pot. “Let’s go sit at the table.”

“They’ve brought Katie in for questioning, and they can’t find Paulie,” Joe said as he dropped into a chair.

“Seriously? Katie?”

“Well, it’s her front lawn. They don’t think she did it, but they do think Paulie might have been involved.”

“Is he really that stupid?” Jamie asked.

“Before all of this, I would have said no, not even close. Now? I’m not so sure,” Joey replied.

“I got a weird call last night. I asked Clemens to track it, he said he had a number and location. I told him to send it to whomever was on call. I don’t have a message from him, so I don’t know if they found anything or not.”

“What kind of call?”

“They said they’d taken out Donovan and that no matter where I hid, they would take me out too.”

“You need to give Sarge a call and see if they picked anyone up,” Joe said.

“Yeah, after I eat something. You know who would do stuff like that? Mexican cartels. I don’t think the Russians even bothered with genital mutilation. Cut off a tongue? Sure, but not cut off a man’s junk.”

“Why am I not disturbed that you know this stuff?” Joey asked as he handed a bagel sandwich to Jamie.

“Because I’m just that awesome of a detective,” Jamie replied. “I read all kinds of weird shit and it sticks – and sometimes helps solve cases. So, what did you take away from the scene?”

“Someone was sending a message, that was pretty clear,” Joey said. “From the display and the positioning of the body, to the sheer amount of blood spread all over. I don’t know if they killed him on the front lawn, but he sure as hell bled out there.”

“What message were they sending - and to whom? I mean, *I* don’t live there. Katie? I find it difficult to think she’s involved in this at all. Paulie? What the hell is he up to that gets a mob boss killed on the front lawn of his...what? Girlfriend?” Jamie took another bite, chewed and swallowed, then continued. “None of it makes any sense.”

Joey’s phone rang and he frowned. “Don’t know who it is.”

“Answer it anyway,” Jamie said.

Joey hit the button and put it on speaker. “Mahoney.”

“Joey? I need your help. My car died. I’m just before the Wakefield exit on 95.”

“Whose phone is this?” Joey asked.

“A guy stopped to try and help, and he loaned me his phone. I left mine at work. Can you come get me?”

“Yeah, just lock your doors and don’t let anyone in. They’re looking for you,” Joey said.

“Who is?” Paulie asked.

“Everyone. Good and bad. Hear me?”

“I hear you. Thanks, Joey.”

The call disconnected, and Joey made another call. “Hey, Sarge, it’s Mahoney. Giannetti just called. His car died just before the Wakefield exit on 95. I told him to lock the doors and wait. You want to get one of the locals to go pick him up?”

“Yeah, it’s too risky leaving him out there. I’ve got a friend in Lynnfield I can send over. What’s your password?” Sarge asked.

Every partner pair had a password to show that whoever said it was okay to work with, mostly for undercover case work, but it was useful for other things – like sending a stranger to pick up your murder suspect partner.

“Chicken liver,” Joey said. “We both hate them.”

“I’ll have Pete go get him. Did he sound like he knew what was up?”

“No, sir. He said he left his phone in his desk at work. I don’t know what’s up with him, but why would his phone be at work if he’s been off the last few days?”

“Good question, Mahoney. I’ll be sure to ask him once they bring him in. And between you and me, and Kennedy – I don’t think Paulie’s involved in any of this. Is he doing something stupid? Probably, but I don’t think he’s a killer. Oh, and tell Kennedy to lay low. I got a sheet on the call he reported last night. The phone was dumped and no one was there. As for Giannetti, I’ll let you know what we learn. Stay safe.”

“Thanks, Sarge. Will do,” Joey said and disconnected the call.

“Doesn’t Saul Mizzotta have a vacation home up in Newbury?” Jamie asked.

“Does he? I have no clue. But if he does, that makes Paulie’s little trip a bit suspect, doesn’t it?” Joey asked.

“It most certainly does,” Jamie said as he sent a text to the Sarge, informing him of Saul’s vacation spot.

“Then again, it could just be pure coincidence,” Joey said as he finished off his sandwich.

“I don’t believe in coincidences like that,” Jamie replied as he cleaned up the wrappings and refilled their mugs. “Speaking of things one believes in – do you believe in ghosts?”

Joey arched one brow as he sipped his coffee. “I’m not adverse to the idea, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen one. Why do you ask?”

“I think I’ve seen one, and I even went to the hospital to get an MRI and stuff to make sure I didn’t have brain damage or a tumor or something,” Jamie said. “Everything came back fine.”

“And you’re not on any medication or anything?”

“Nope, just a multivitamin when I remember to take it.”

“You’re about the most stable, sane person I know, Jameson Kennedy. If you tell me you saw a ghost, then I believe you saw a ghost. I wouldn’t go telling anyone else, though. I need your help solving Mike’s murder, and you locked up in McLean Psych won’t help us one bit with that.”

“I know. I’m still wondering if maybe I imagined it all, but too many things have happened to prove that it was real.”

“Speaking of off the wall things – if Nicky Carrera is dead, and he’s the one that took Mike from the grocery store parking lot, is the murderer now dead or was someone else involved?” Joey asked.

“We know someone else was involved because there were three guys in the van, besides Carrera, that took Mikey. Then there’s the second van. Was Saul involved in all of it? Is someone else calling the shots? I’d say someone else is clearly involved because neither the Italian, nor the Irish mobs would kill the way Nicky was taken out.”

Joey sipped his coffee, then looked over at Jamie. “I’m gonna ask you something, just to say I asked it, but I don’t think it’s even possible – so don’t get pissed at me, okay?”

“That’s a long lead in for a question. Just ask it.”

“You don’t think Mikey was into anything that would have pissed the cartels off, do you?”

Jamie opened his mouth, then closed it and shook his head. “No. I’ve been sitting here trying to think if any of our cases even touched on cartel business – and we never had one that was involved with any gangs or ties to the Mexican cartels. Nothing.”

“I should get going,” Joey said. “Do you need anything before I head out?”

“No, I restocked and got a few things last night. I’m looking forward to my bed frame getting here. A mattress on the floor, even a good mattress, sucks for sleeping.”

“I hear ya. Okay, call if you need anything,” Joey said.

“Just call when you know what’s going on with Paulie and Katie, please?” Jamie asked.

“Sure thing,” Joey replied. “See ya.”

Jamie locked up and set the alarm after Joey left, then pulled out his laptop and settled at the table.

“You should’ve asked if Joey and Paulie ever had a case that tied to the cartels,” Mike said.

Jamie cried out, then slapped a hand on the table. “You *really* need to stop doing that shit before I have a heart attack. And what the hell? It’s been nearly twenty-four hours since you were buried. I thought you were gone for good.”

Mike sat in the chair Joey had just been in and gave Jamie a serious look. “I chose to come back this time.”

“What do you mean, you chose?”

“I mean, I spoke to The Conductor – that’s what he called himself – and he gave me a choice. I decided to come back.”

“Okay,” Jamie said. “Do you know what happened last night?”

“No, I just got back this morning. Showed up here a little after Joey did. Why, what happened?”

“Nicky Carrera’s body was left on your front lawn early this morning or late last night. His throat was slashed and his junk cut off and shoved in his mouth. Katie’s been brought in for questioning and Paulie is being picked up after his car died. Looks like he was headed towards Saul Mizzotta’s place in Newbury.”

“Katie? There’s no way.”

“Yeah, that’s what I said. I guess they just wanted to question her since it’s her front lawn – but they’re really after Paulie.”

“The kids got away with Elise to Florida okay?”

“Yeah, they’re gone and safely headed to the Keys.”

“At least they’re out of this mess. Anyway, can you get into the case files and find out if Joey or Paulie ever had a case with the cartels?”

“Right, yeah, I can do that,” Jamie said and pulled up the file archives database.

“This is going to take a while.”

“I’m not in any hurry. I’ll wander outside and see if anyone’s watching the place.”

“Sounds good,” Jamie said. He got up and refilled his coffee, then settled in to start going through case files. About an hour in, he sat back and stared at the screen. “Mike, you here?”

“I’m here,” Mike said. “There’s a guy in a car across the street and up three houses, but he’s alone and hasn’t been on his phone yet, so no idea what’s going on. I’m keeping an eye on him.”

“Okay. Hey, did you know that those two have only been partners about four years? I mean, I should’ve known that, but I never paid much attention until we started hanging out together a couple of years back.”

“I think I knew that, but didn’t really remember,” Mike said.

“Well, before he was Joey’s partner, Paulie was partnered with that old guy, Oswald Anderson.”

“Ohh, right. I remember him. Went by Ozzie. Liked his cigars. Didn’t he retire after he got shot on a drug bust?”

“Yeah, a drug bust with a gang tied to the Temerario Cartel. That was their case with the DEA and Ozzie took a bullet, then retired. Paulie got an award for it, and Joey’s other partner moved out of state, so they got put together.”

“Can you track Ozzie down?” Mike asked.

“He died two years ago. Lung cancer.”

“So, maybe Nicky’s murder is tied to Paulie and that Temerario case – while Nicky and his crew are after us because of Tony Carrera’s case?”

“That’s what it looks like – but why are the two things tied together? I don’t see the Italian mafia and the Temerario cartel playing nice together in any world I could imagine,” Jamie said.

“The only thing that ties them together is Paul Giannetti. His sniffing around my wife put a dead body on her front lawn,” Mike said.

“Don’t get mad at me, but I think Katie’s been sniffing back,” Jamie said.

“I know. They hooked up pretty fast for a woman who was supposedly faithful and adoring to her late husband,” Mike said. “I’m not mad. You’re being a good detective – and there’s nothing I can do about it from here, anyway.”

“Colleen asked Elise something the other day. She asked her if I died, would she pretend they were dead too, like Auntie Katie. Elise said that Katie has been very different, and she doesn’t think it’s just your death that did it. The kids are safe with Elise and Katie didn’t even ask for the address or about coming to visit, so she doesn’t know where they are, exactly. Just that they’re in the Florida Keys.”

“Well, when we did our wills, we also set it up for our kids to be under the guardianship of the other couple if anything happened, remember? So, Elise stepping up and taking care of Maureen and Kevin is a good thing. Maybe Katie is just not dealing with her grief well? I don’t want to think what I’m thinking, to be honest,” Mike said.

“I don’t want to think about it either, my friend. However, it’s pretty clear that we need to seriously examine whether Katie was somehow involved in your murder.”

They sat and looked at each other for a moment, then sighed in unison.

“Clusterfuck,” they both said, then Jamie chuckled. “Glad you’re back, Mikey.”

“I’m glad I’m back, too. I couldn’t go and leave this unfinished. It’s just not right.”

“And it’s getting more convoluted by the day. I’m glad you’re around to help. I’m going to dig into this Temerario case, then let Joey know what I’ve found.”

“I’ll go keep an eye on our silent stalker,” Mike said, and slid through the closed door.

“That is so weird,” Jamie muttered before he turned back to the laptop.

Chapter Ten

Jamie had attached the information he'd found to an email and sent it to Joey's private account, then put the chin-up bar in his doorway and did a workout. He watched TV, played a game on the computer, then sat down and ordered a bunch of stuff for the apartment because he was bored.

Soon, he found himself looking at property for sale. The time he'd spent at Joey's place had reminded him of some dreams he had long ago left behind, and awakened a desire to have his own place once more. He wasn't rich by any standard, but he had invested well and could manage a substantial down payment so his monthly expenses would be affordable. Now to decide if he wanted privacy and space or if he wanted convenience and no yard work. Remembering how much he hated mowing his lawn, he started looking at condos and townhouses closer to work. He decided he would 'window shop' for a bit until he could comfortably say he was no longer a target for assassination. It would suck if he went to check out a new place and got his Realtor shot in the crossfire or something.

Jamie liked his apartment in the old triple-decker. It had character with nice architectural details and huge rooms. The apartment above him was currently empty, and had been for months. The landlord fancied himself a home-repair

guy, and was slowly updating and renovating the place. The downstairs tenant, Mrs. Fontana, was an elderly lady who lived alone with her two cats. Currently, she was visiting her grandchildren in Maine, and Jamie was thrilled that she'd taken the cats this time. Last time, he'd gone in and cared for the furry little monsters and they were not fans of any male presence. He still had a scar on the back of his hand where one of them had swiped at him hard.

"House hunting?" Mike asked.

"Yeah, for when this is all over and I'm no longer on someone's hit list. Sampson will eventually finish that upstairs apartment and it has three bedrooms, so little kids running around is a distinct possibility. I'd rather not live here when that happens."

"I hear ya. No lawn though, right?"

Jamie had to laugh. "Yeah, as much as I like the privacy and space, I don't like it enough to mow my own damned lawn again."

"And you don't make enough to hire someone to do it every two weeks without it taking a chunk out of your wallet. So, condo or townhouse, because someone *else* can do the yard work."

"My thought process exactly. So, what's my silent stalker doing?" Jamie asked.

"He left. Never took a call, never made a call. I got the plates, but it's a rental. Probably a corporate rental so you won't get much. Write this down," Mike said and rattled off the plate numbers.

Jamie made a note, then logged in to HPD and ran the plate numbers. "You were right. Comes back to a 'Semeyny Corporate Services'. I've never heard of them. Probably a shell or something."

"Run a search on it?" Mike asked.

"Already typing," Jamie replied as he plugged the company name into the search engine. "Comes up with a generic website and a post office box number. Yep,

shell company. The WHOIS search only tells us it's a site. No personal information available."

"Going to pass it off to white collar and see if they know who it is?" Mike asked.

"Naw. We don't even know if the guy was watching me or if he was a PI for someone else and watching any of the fifty-something other places on this street. I'm already paranoid enough, I don't need the station thinking I've lost it, too."

"Speaking of the station, when do you go back?" Mike asked.

"Next week, I hope," Jamie replied. "They don't want me on the street with a price on my head."

"Have you heard who they're going to give you for a partner?"

"Nope. I think it's all going to depend on what the hell is going on with Paulie. If he's really tangled up in this, then he'll be off the force and Joey will be without a partner, too. Maybe we'll end up together. Sarge already knows we're working together, so it's not a stretch."

"Have you heard any updates?" Mike asked.

"No, and it's making me a little crazy. I'm not good at just sitting around the house. I need to be *doing* something."

"I see you're wearing the watch," Mike said.

"I put it on for the funeral, and then decided to keep wearing it. I thought you were gone for good this time, and it was a nice reminder," Jamie replied.

"Keep wearing it. It looks good on you," Mike said.

A knock on the door made them both fall silent.

"I'll go look," Mike said and went to stick his head out through the door panel. He came back with a puzzled expression on his face. "It's Drina Popov."

"What the hell?" Jamie asked, then glanced at his wrist. He quickly took the watch off and tucked it into his messenger bag, then closed his laptop and made sure there were no notes or papers she could see. Another tap on the door and Jamie went over to it.

“Who is it?” he asked through the closed door.

“Alexandrina Popov. I’d like to speak to you, Mr. Kennedy, if you could spare a few minutes?”

“Was there anyone with her?” Jamie asked Mike in a whisper.

“No, just her,” Mike said.

Jamie turned off the alarm and unlocked the door, then stepped back to let the woman enter. Light blond hair, bright blue eyes, a true Nordic princess – Drina Popov not only moved like a goddess, she smelled expensive, too.

“Come in, Ms. Popov,” Jamie said as she moved past him into his apartment. He shut and locked the door behind her, then gestured to the table and chairs. “My apologies, I’m still replacing my belongings after my place was trashed, so I’m afraid I don’t have much to offer. Would you like a coffee?”

“A cup of coffee would be welcome,” Drina said as she slid out of her coat. A scarf and large sunglasses joined the leather jacket on the chair beside her as she sat at the table. “Please, call me Drina. I’m here as a friend,” she said.

“How do you take your coffee?” Jamie asked.

“Black, please,” Drina replied, so Jamie brought a clean mug over and filled it from the pot at the table. “Here you go,” Jamie said, then sat with his own cup.

“So, what brings you by?”

“I saw you at Michael’s funeral. I noticed you were wearing my gift to him. I wondered if perhaps he had spoken to you of me.”

“A bit. What in particular were you wondering about?”

“I wondered if he had mentioned we were lovers,” Drina replied.

Jamie choked on the swallow of coffee he’d just taken and looked off to the side where Mike stood, mouth hanging open.

“Not even in my dreams,” Mike said. “That’d be like sleeping with a piranha.”

“I can’t say he did,” Jamie said after a moment. “Why do you ask?”

She opened her purse and pulled out a photo of a little boy that looked more like Drina than anyone else, but he did have darker hair like Mike. “This is Mikhail. Our son. He’ll be four in a month.”

“Nope. Not even close. I never put my dick anywhere *near* that woman,” Mike seethed.

“I see. And you expect me to do *what* with this information?” Jamie asked as he slid the photo back.

“I heard people say you two were like brothers. I wanted someone else to know about Mikhail. Someone that could tell him stories of his father, so he would get to know the man, even though he’s gone.”

“Bring him back to meet me when he’s in school and I’ll talk to him. Not quite four is not old enough to hear some of the stories about his father.”

“You don’t even question that this is true?” Drina asked.

“Oh, I have a lot of questions,” Jamie said as he leaned forward. “Like, why the hell are you here? Why are you lying about Mike cheating on his wife? That kid doesn’t look like anyone but you – and I know Mike’s other kids. They both look more like him than his wife. If that were his kid, it would look like him.” Jamie gave her a tight smile. “I know Mike better than most, and I know he was completely faithful to Katie, even though she may not have been to him. So, what’s your game?”

Drina leaned back and took a sip of her coffee, her gaze searching Jamie’s face. “I believe you. No, that’s not Michael’s son. It’s a photo of my half-brother, Maxim. I needed to see if you would stand up for Michael or play along and believe he had cheated.”

“Why the hell would you do that? What’s your game, Drina? Tell me now, or get the fuck out of my house.”

“Michael was good to me. Kind. He didn’t have to be, and he went above and beyond. He didn’t abuse the friendship I offered, and he genuinely cared about

my little Sasha – my dog. That is why I gave him the watch. When I saw you wearing it, I realized you two were as close as people said, so I wanted to come test you and see if it was so.”

“I don’t like tests,” Jamie said, tone cold.

“You are trying to solve Michael’s murder, yes?”

“Obviously.”

“Yet you are not going into work?”

“I don’t see how that’s really any of your business,” Jamie said.

“I mean, so you can access information from home?” Drina asked.

“Some, I can. Mostly, I’m helping with the things I don’t need database access to handle. Why?”

“May I have your email address?”

Jamie reached into his messenger bag and pulled out one of his business cards.

“Here, you can use this one.”

Drina shook her head. “No, it needs to be one no one but you will see. I know your office monitors the work email accounts.”

Jamie sighed, flipped the card over, and wrote one of his private email accounts on it. He had a couple for various uses. “Use this one, then.”

“That will suffice. Thank you,” Drina said and got to her feet.

“Why did you want an email account?” Jamie asked as he rose with her.

“I have information I want to get to you, that no one else can see. No one can know I’m reaching out to you. My life, and yours, would be forfeit.”

“Well, I’m already on someone’s hit list, so they can get in line,” Jamie muttered.

“You *were* on Dominic Carrera’s hit list. He is now dead, so you are no longer on their list. Saul Mizzotta has taken over the family business and has no interest in making the cops want him any more than they already do. Anthony Carrera died a couple of hours ago in the prison hospital, and the family is now known as

the Mizzotta crime family. Saul moved the base of operations to his home in Newbury, and left a few mid-level family members to handle the three businesses left in Harbor.”

“How do you know all of this? How can I prove any of it?” Jamie asked.

“Find out if Tony Carrera is still breathing,” Drina said. “If he is, I lied. If he isn’t, you know I’m speaking the truth.”

“Do you need help getting out of here safely?” Jamie asked her.

She smiled then, and it was as if the sun had come out on a cloudy day. “You *are* truly as good as I had hoped.”

“Well, I appreciate that, but do you? Because if you go down the stairs and then through the door to the left of the stairs, it’ll take you into a short passage that goes to the back yard. A gate at the back will allow you to exit without being seen.”

“That is good to know. I will exit that way. My driver will pick me up at the end of the block. Watch for my email, Jameson Kennedy.”

He watched as she put on her jacket, wound the scarf around her head, then slid on the oversized glasses. “Stay safe out there, Ms. Popov.”

“You, too, Mr. Kennedy. Good day.”

He opened the door for her, watched her head down the stairs, then closed it and locked up once more.

“That was beyond weird,” Mike said.

“The ghost, telling me what weird is. But yeah, that was really strange,” Jamie said before he got his phone out and called Joe.

“*Mahoney*,” Joe said.

“Joey, it’s Jamie. Did Tony Carrera die today?”

“How the hell do you know that? I made a list of stuff I needed to go over with you and was just about to call and ask if you wanted burgers and fries from that place on Main. I figured I’d bring over food and fill you in on everything.”

“That sounds great. So, Tony is dead?”

“Yeah, he is. Threw a blood clot and it killed him before they could do anything.”

“I’ve got a lot to tell you, too. See you soon.”

“About ninety minutes. See ya.”

Jamie disconnected the call and tossed his phone onto the table. “My head hurts.”

“Mine would, too, if it could,” Mike said. “So you think you’re off the hit list now?”

“If Drina said I am, and had all of that information? Then yeah, I’m thinking it’s true.”

“We’ll have to wait and see what Joey says,” Mike said.

“Well I hope it’s done, because I’m finished being locked up in my own home.”

“I hear you, my friend. I hear you.”

Chapter Eleven

“So apparently, it’s now the Mizzotta crime family and is based out of Newbury, not Harbor. Sarge said you can come back to work tomorrow, if you want. Also, Paul Giannetti is no longer a detective, and for the short term, you and I are going to be partnered up,” Joey said as they devoured bacon double cheeseburgers, fries, and soft drinks he’d brought for dinner.

“Was Paulie working for the Carreras?”

“Yep. Well, mostly for Saul. He’s been on their payroll for years. I feel like an idiot because I never knew,” Joey said.

“What’s going to happen to him?” Jamie asked.

“He was arraigned this evening and will be put in solitary until his trial. They’re working on him to make a deal where he spills everything he knows about Saul Mizzotta and then Paulie goes into witness protection and disappears.”

“What about Katie?”

“She was released after a couple of hours of questioning, went home and started packing. I heard she’s spending the night at Paulie’s place.”

“I wonder what her plans are, now.”

“I have no idea. At least the kids are safe with Elise, right?”

“Right. And while this is all great information, it’s not done. We both know it’s not done. Nicky Carrera was involved in Mike’s murder – as were those three sidekicks of Nicky’s. Saul was also likely involved, but he’s still walking around. I still believe there’s someone else in the mix. Someone above both Nicky and Saul’s level. Someone that had no qualms killing the head of a crime family on a cop widow’s front lawn.”

“I hear you, but I have no ideas – do you?” Joey asked.

“I do. I had a visitor today. Drina Popov.”

“What the *what*?”

“She was at Mikey’s funeral, too. She played a couple of mind games with me and I finally got her to relax enough that she asked for a private email address so she could send me information. I’ve been watching my phone to see if anything has come in yet – but no dice.”

“What the hell, Jamie? What would she want with you?”

“She considered Mike a friend after he took care of her dog a year or so back. We rolled up on an accident before the patrol cars could get there. Drina had been hit by a drunk driver and her car was totaled. She was banged up, but not too bad. Her dog would’ve had to go to a shelter, and Mike took him home instead. Drina was held overnight and he took the dog to her place once she was released. She knew Mike was good people and wanted to make sure I was good people, too, before she shared something. I have no clue *what* she plans on sharing.”

“But you think it has something to do with Mike’s murder?” Joey asked.

“Why else would she have come to me? She’s the one that told me Saul had moved the business to Newbury and was now the head of the family – and that Tony was dead.”

“That does add an interesting twist to things,” Joey said. “Let me know what she says?”

Jamie grinned. “Well, of course, *partner*.”

Joey laughed. “Right. There’s that. So – whose office are we going to set up in? Yours or mine?”

“Mine. It has more windows to the outside that actually open,” Jamie said.

“Ooh, good point. I’ll pack up my stuff and start moving it tomorrow if you can finish clearing out Mike’s side of the place?”

“It’s pretty much cleared out. The plants are spread out between us because of the window. If you want those moved, just let me know – otherwise it’s all yours.”

“Sounds good. I’m going to head out. It’s been a long day and I’ve got a bunch of crap to move tomorrow,” Joey said.

“Need my help sorting through Paulie’s stuff?”

“No, I already have all of the case files. Internal Affairs is going through his computer and notebooks. Once they’re done, they’ll give me the case notes to add to the files, but otherwise, I can’t touch anything.”

“Okay,” Jamie said as they both got up. “See you in the morning. I’ll bring the donuts if you bring the coffee?”

“Only bring a half dozen, and I’ll bring breakfast sandwiches, too. Stay safe, my friend. See you in the morning.” Joey left and Jamie did his locking up routine, then went to clean up from dinner.

“I’m glad you’ll have him as your partner,” Mike said. “He’s a good cop.”

“And a good person,” Jamie said. “I’m glad, too. I was afraid I’d get stuck with some rookie and spend more time training than doing.”

“Ugh, that would’ve sucked. Um, Jamie? I had a thought. Isn’t Semeyny a Russian word?”

“Maybe? Let me look it up,” Jamie said and went to his laptop. A few moments later, he laughed. “It means ‘family’. Now I’m really interested in whatever Alexandrina Popov wants to email me. Good catch, Mike.”

“I may be brain dead, but I can still come up with good things once in a while,” Mike said.

Jamie snorted laughter. “Funny. Very funny.”



The next morning, Jamie felt like he had come home when he walked into his office. Joey had already begun moving things and the tech department had set up Joey’s docking station and monitors on Mike’s old desk. A cup of coffee beside a wrapped sandwich on a paper plate sat in the middle of Jamie’s desk, so he put the box of donuts across both desks, hung up his suit coat, and took a seat.

“Good morning,” Joey said.

“Morning,” Jamie replied. “Thanks for breakfast.”

“And thanks for the sugar rush,” Joey replied. “Sarge wants to see us in his office in about thirty minutes, so eat up.”

Jamie unwrapped the sandwich and took a bite while he logged in to his work laptop. “Glad I did all that case admin work while I was out of the office. We shouldn’t be too overloaded out of the gate.”

“Yeah and the handful of cases Paulie and I were working have been passed off to other teams. I think they’re worried that I am also tainted,” Joey said.

“Maybe, but you and I, and Sarge, know different.”

“Speaking of knowing different – did Drina send you an email yet?” Joey asked.

“Not yet. I’m wondering if that was just another one of her mind games,” Jamie replied.

“I don’t see any new cases for us yet – maybe Sarge is holding off putting us on the rotation list until he talks to us.”

“As long as conversation doesn’t start with ‘it’s been great working with you’, I’m happy. It’s just so damned good to be back in the office,” Jamie said.

“We should get over there, come on,” Joey said as he got to his feet. Jamie locked his laptop, slid his phone into his pocket, and reached into the donut box to pull out a paper bag with something in it.

“What’s that?”

“Sarge likes his crullers. I got him one.”

“Suck up,” Joey teased.

“You betcha,” Jamie replied and they locked the door behind them. It might seem strange to lock an office in a police station, but many people other than cops could be found wandering the halls. It was just good practice.

A tap on the Sergeant’s door, followed by a “come in” had Jamie pushing the door open and taking one of the two seats cleared in front of Lincoln Tremont’s desk.

“Here you go, Sarge. A welcome back to work gift from me to you,” Jamie said as he set the bag on the edge of the desk.

Joe took the other seat and they both watched Sarge choke up a little before he let out a breath. “Donovan never forgot a cruller for me when you guys did donut runs. Thank you.” He cleared his throat and set the bag aside. “So, you two are okay with being partners?”

“Would it matter if we weren’t?” Joe asked.

“Not really, but I was mostly asking Kennedy here,” Sarge said.

“He’s a friend, Sarge. He’s a good cop and as honest as they come. Do I even remotely suspect he was in on Paulie’s shit? No way in hell. I wouldn’t be working with him off book if he had been tangled up in it. The way I see it, Paul Giannetti is complicit in Michael Donovan’s death, and should be up on accessory to murder charges. I also think Katherine Donovan should be charged

with aiding and abetting in her husband's murder. Only problem is, I don't have hard facts for Katie's involvement. Yet."

"Haggerty and Jones may have some. We're waiting on some lab results to come back. Until then, don't even whisper this outside the three of us, ya hear?" Sarge said.

"Hear you, Sarge," they both replied.

"I'll be doing an announcement at tomorrow's roll call and I want you both to stand up there with me. I'm done with the rumor mill in this place. It's worse than high school. But for now, I wanted to fill you both in. You'll be on the overnight roster starting tonight. I'm sorry, but you've got a week of that before you're back on the regular twenty-four hour rotations. It's just how the scheduling worked. I can't change it all up at the last minute without screwing some people over – so when we're done here, get your files all sorted and then go home and catch some sleep before the shift starts. Also, Giannetti is being charged with racketeering, criminal misconduct, and accessory to murder. When we searched his car, we found flecks of Donovan's blood inside the door handle and on the seatbelt clip. He was careful, but not careful enough."

"Does Katie know?" Jamie asked.

"Not yet. We're keeping them from communicating right now. She's been staying at his place, though. She told the cops that she couldn't sleep at her house, after the body on her lawn," Sarge said. "Also, Haggerty and Jones are taking over Donovan's case from Dumbaugh and Dumbeck. They refused to question Giannetti when I told them to do so, and right now they're on suspension pending an Internal Affairs investigation."

Joey did a little fist-pump and Jamie chuckled.

"Sorry, Sarge – but they were a nightmare to try to work with." Joey said.

"Don't I know it," Sarge replied. "But Dumbeck is the daughter of the Commissioner's childhood friend. They had to *really* screw up before I could do

anything about it.”

“My guess is, giving a cop killer a pass is a big enough screw up?” Jamie asked.

“And then some. I’m eighty percent sure they’re both going to lose their badges,” Sarge said. “So, tomorrow when you come in and the others are headed out, I’ll take care of the rumor mill. For now, go get your shit together and get some sleep. I hear it’s a full moon tonight.”

“Aw, hell,” Joey sighed. “Warm weather, full moon, and a Friday night.”

“Just don’t say it,” Jamie said to Joey. “Anything else, Sarge?”

“No. Get out of here and get to work. Stay safe out there,” Sarge said.

“Yes, sir,” they both replied and headed back to their own office.

“Well, look at that – the bad luck cop and the bad choices cop all partnered up,” Matthews said as he stood between the two of them and their office door.

“What’s your problem, Matthews? Get out of our way,” Jamie said.

“I don’t know which one of you to feel sorrier for – the one who let his partner die or the one whose partner helped kill him,” Matthews replied.

Joey slammed his shoulder into Matthews and bounced him off the door frame so hard he fell on his ass. “Whoops, didn’t see you there, Matthews. My bad.” He opened the office door and pushed it wide enough for Jamie to also enter.

Jamie swerved as he went towards the doorway and let one foot swing out and kick Matthews in the thigh. “Oh, sorry, Matthews. What are you doing on the floor? Did you break your desk chair again? Maybe you should lay off the donuts.”

“You deserve each other,” Matthews yelled at them just before they shut the door.

“What a prick,” Joey said.

“He’s always been an asshole. I’ll be watching his face tomorrow at roll call,” Jamie said.

“You weren’t surprised when Sarge said that about Paulie being involved,” Joey said. “Why?”

“I wasn’t surprised about Katie, either. I’m supposed to go over to Mike’s old place tonight and pick up some boxes of the kid’s stuff to ship down to Florida. She signed over her parental rights to Elise the other day. Elise got the envelope served to her by a lawyer down there. The kids asked me to get some of their things, and I left a voicemail for Katie to tell her I’d be doing this. She said she’d boxed up their stuff already, and I was welcome to go over there – in her reply text.”

“Did either of you know she would be doing that?”

“Nope. I told Elise I’d fill her in later. I’ll probably call her when I get home,” Jamie said.

“We can swing by the house together tonight if you want?”

“No, there’s no rush. I think I’m going to rent a small truck anyway, so I can get all of it in one shot, and make sure I pack up photos of their father for them to have later. I put in for one for Sunday afternoon, if you want to give me a hand then?”

“That sounds like a better plan,” Joey said. “I feel sorry for those kids. They basically lost their father *and* their mother in the space of two weeks.”

“Elise said all four of the kids are doing well. There are still nightmares and tears, but mostly they’re settling in and enjoying living on the beach. She sounds happy, too – away from here and doing what she loves.”

“Is she still working as an editor?”

“Yep. She is also setting up her own indie author publishing house. Some of her friendships with the authors she edits for have helped her see they needed the resources she can bring to the table. I also think that sitting on the screen porch with the ocean a few feet away and working on her laptop has convinced her that doing it herself makes more sense.”

“That does sound pretty sweet. I’m glad things are working out for her.”

“Me, too. Some of her behaviors really pissed me off, but she’s not a bad person – and we made two pretty awesome kids together. I just have to not let my personal anger and pain get in the way of parenting those kids with her. She’s been handling our interactions much better, since Mike died. I think she realized we had a lot more on the positive side of things than the negative.”

“Harsh wake-up calls can do that,” Joey said. “Okay, I’m getting out of here. Get out of here soon yourself, okay? We need a couple of hours of sleep before the calls start tonight.”

“I hear you. Hey, don’t forget to lock your laptop in the file cabinet. Our door has been busted twice. We lock up everything,” Jamie said.

“Oh, right. Hand me yours and I’ll put it in here, too.”

Jamie showed Joey where everything got locked up, in three different locations to make it harder if someone broke in. Then they shut off the lights and headed to their respective homes. They both knew that it had the potential to be a very long night.

Chapter Twelve

Jamie did manage to catch a few hours of sleep before he found himself back at his desk. This time, he brought the coffee and a couple of fried chicken dinner boxes.

“Thanks for the food,” Joey said as he sat down and pulled his box towards him.

“I slept through the alarm and had to rush.”

“No problem. I woke up hungry and figured we could eat here and take a moment to talk about an email I received on the way in to work tonight.”

“Drina finally emailed you?”

“Yeah, and it’s...interesting. I don’t know if I’m supposed to believe all of it,” Jamie said.

“Well, what did she say?”

“She said Paulie was the one who helped set up Mike’s abduction but he wasn’t supposed to be killed. One of the goons got overly enthusiastic – and then everyone panicked. Apparently, Saul reached out to The Priest and that’s what got Nicky killed. There are photos of Katie and Paulie standing in the window, watching one of Popov’s men kill Nicky on the lawn. Once Nicky was dead, Paulie went back to his place and then on to Newbury, while Katie went back to

bed. I'm going to forward the whole thing to Sarge from here – because I want to make sure Katie Donovan gets what's coming to her.”

“Is that all she says?”

“Pretty much. There's a bit about how she would like to have a coffee with me sometime, but as for the real meat and potatoes? That's it.” Jamie sent the whole email to Sarge, with a note attached that he'd shared the info about Katie and Paulie with his partner, but not the rest of the contents. Within moments, he received a reply that simply said ‘watch your back’.

The rest of the night passed without incident while the two of them worked on case documentation and administrative tasks.

Just before their shift was over, Sarge stuck his head in the door. “Remember, you're both supposed to be standing with me at roll call in about ten minutes.”

“Roger that, sir,” Jamie said. “Shutting everything down and packing up. I'll be there shortly.”

“Same here, Sarge,” Joey replied.

Soon they were both standing behind Sarge and off to the side while the rest of the two shifts settled in rows in front of them. Detectives usually avoided roll call unless there was an important announcement or presentation. As Sarge laid out the current status of Mike's murder case, and then explained that neither Jamie nor Joey were to be shunned for what had happened, Jamie watched the faces of his fellow officers. Some relaxed when they heard the ‘full story’ and received information they previously had not been privy to. Others sneered and gave Jamie and Joey looks that did not bode well for their support if they had to call in for backup. Sarge made a few notes, dismissed roll call, then asked Jamie to stay back, as well as the five who had sneered at his news.

Once everyone else left, Sarge pointed at the five who had sneered and asked them if they had a problem with believing what he had said. They all said they did.

“Well, then all five of you are on suspension for two weeks, starting now. If you can’t follow my orders and believe me when I give you information, then you will not be working in my department.”

Angry voices rose and Sarge snapped. “This is *not* up for debate, gentlemen. This is an order. Hand over your badge and gun on your way out.”

Once the five detectives left, Sarge sighed and nodded to Jamie. “Give me a hand carrying these back to my office?”

Jamie grabbed his bag and helped Sarge empty the guns and tucked some in his bag to help Sarge carry everything back to his office. Once it was all secured in the safe, Jamie was asked to take a seat.

“I wanted to talk to you about that email,” Sarge said.

“I don’t know what to believe, Sarge. She plays head games. I mean, the photos are pretty obvious, but the rest of what she said?” Jamie shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

“Convince me why you don’t think so,” Sarge replied.

“There have been plenty of times when I could have been taken out, and I’m still here. That, right there, says why I don’t buy it.”

“Okay, I’m going to trust your instincts on this one, but if you ever feel like you need to change things up, let me know? You’re one of my best detectives, Kennedy. I want to keep you around for a while.”

“Trust me, Sarge. I want to keep me around for a while, too. I’ll keep you in the loop,” Jamie said.

“Good thing. Okay, get out of here. See you tomorrow.”

Jamie got into his car and pulled out into traffic. It didn’t take him long to get home, make a sandwich, and stretch out in the recliner to eat.

“What did the email say, Jamie?” Mike asked.

“Did you hear what I told Joey earlier?”

“About Katherine and Giannetti? Yeah. I had to leave before I blew out the lights or something.”

“Drina also said that Joey was in on it all. I don’t believe it. I’ve been working with him since the day after we found your body, and he was hurt by how involved Paulie ended up being in the whole thing. I think she’s just playing another one of her head games.”

“No way he’s involved,” Mike said. “If you want, I’ll go hang out at his place for a few days and see if anything comes up that makes me believe differently.”

“If you want to,” Jamie said. “I’m going to go pass out for a while. I don’t shift sleep schedules as easy as I used to.”

“You’re getting old, my friend,” Mike teased.

“Yeah, maybe. Wake me up if something changes, huh?”

“Sure thing. Don’t forget to set the alarm to night mode, even though it’s daylight.”

“Right, thanks. Okay, talk to you later,” Jamie said as he got up, set the alarm, then headed to bed.

Mike stayed around for a few to make sure Jamie got to sleep before he headed out to Joey’s place. He really didn’t believe Joey was in on it either, but being a fly on the wall was one way to find out the truth.



Over the next few days, things at work got worse. Pranks edged over into harassment. Cooperation on cases fell to zero. The only two that still worked with Jamie and Joey willingly were Haggerty and Jones. They had a better grasp of the complexities of the cases and they didn’t think Joey was involved any more than Jamie did.

Sarge couldn't suspend many more detectives or he wouldn't have enough bodies to work the cases.

"That's it. You two are off nights and working days where I can keep an eye on the shit people are trying to pull. I feel like I'm running a goddamned babysitting club here," Sarge yelled when he came in early one day to find Jamie and Joey busy scrubbing graffiti off their door, and mopping up olive oil that had been poured all over their floor. "And stop cleaning that. We have a cleaning crew for a reason."

"But, Sarge – the cleaning crew doesn't deserve to have to deal with this," Joey said.

"They'll get a bonus. I'll see to it. I need you two to head over to this address and start the process. Haggerty and Jones will go there first thing and relieve you. Dismissed." Sarge handed Jamie a sticky note, so they grabbed their gear and headed out. They hit the exit about the time they heard Sarge roar "Who's responsible for this shit-show?", their steps quickened to get out of the way.

"Let's take yours," Jamie said as they rounded the corner.

"We should take both because once Haggerty and Jones show up, we can go home and sleep. And sleep. And yeah, more sleep," Joey said. "This weekend is going to be rough, switching my schedule back."

"Speaking of weekends, did you ever go on a second date with that guy you met at the baseball game?" Jamie asked.

"I did," Joey replied. "We've been calling and texting. Dai will be back in town next week and I hope I will have some time to spend with him."

"His name is Dai?"

"That's his nickname. His name is Dafydd, but a lot of people have trouble with that. Dafydd Llewellyn."

"He's not Welsh or anything, huh?" Jamie teased.

Joey blushed and shrugged. "He was born in the states, but his parents are from Wales. He gets to travel all over with his intelligence work, so he understands cases and odd hours and such. I'm just hoping this one sticks."

"I hope so, too. You deserve to be happy," Jamie said. "Okay, put the address in your GPS. It's..." Jamie looked at the note and his face paled. "Um, it's next door to Paulie's apartment. Same building."

"You don't think Katie...?"

They both hurried to their cars and tore out of the parking lot. When they got to the building, there were a few cruisers and an ambulance pulled up in front. They showed their badges and got into the elevator to head up to the fifteenth floor. The crime scene was in the apartment right next door to where Katie was supposedly staying.

"You go check the scene," Jamie said. "I'm going to check on Katie."

"Good idea," Joey replied and pulled on paper booties and gloves before he entered the crime scene unit.

Jamie knocked on the other door and waited.

Katie ripped the door open, mid-yell. "I told you, leave me the hell...oh, it's you."

"I'm just making sure you're okay," Jamie said.

"I'm fine. Don't bother me," Katie replied.

"I got a truck for this weekend. I'll go get the kid's stuff then. Is there anything you want me to get for you while I've got the truck?"

"No. I took what I wanted. You take whatever you want for the kids or you, I don't care. Drop the house keys at Harbor Realty so they can sell the place."

"What happened to you, Katie?" Jamie asked, voice soft. "You gave up your kids? Your home?"

"Shit happens, Jamie," Katie said. "Elise is a better mother than I ever could be. Now, please. Just leave me be."

Katie started to shut the door and Jamie put a hand out. “Wait. Did you know the deceased next door?”

“I did, in passing. She was a real piece of work. No great loss. I’ve got stuff to do,” Katie said and slammed the door.

Jamie shook his head, then grabbed booties and gloves for himself and entered the unit next door.

“The deceased is Marcy Stafford, age thirty-two,” Joey said as Jamie entered the foyer of the upscale condo. A kitchen to his right held stainless appliances and granite countertops – and a lot of blood splatter. The rack of kitchen knives had been knocked over, with some on the floor. Blood covered the cream colored walls and carpet as if it had been flicked from a paint brush. Splatters and spray patterns went up to the ceiling and puddled on the carpet all the way into the living and dining room space. Glass and cream colored furniture with bright art, cushions and throws had only accented the incredible view out to the harbor and islands that one whole wall of the unit exposed. Now, the brightest color was from the blood that once had been inside of Marcy Stafford. She lay sprawled on her back, her blonde hair matted and tangled, her nightgown bloodied and torn.

A member of the coroner’s team crouched beside the body and made notes while another took photos from every angle, up close and at a distance.

“I’ve counted at least twenty stab wounds, but I won’t be able to give you an accurate report until I get her on my table,” Dr. Finney said. “I’m going to guess that the cause of death was either the stab wound up into her heart, or the one that caught her carotid and sprayed blood everywhere. Or both. Like I said, until she’s on my table, it’s a guess.”

“What’s the time of death?” Joey asked, notebook and pen in hand.

“I’d say anytime between three and six this morning. The blood is only now starting to congeal so she’s not been dead long. Liver temp puts it closer to six, but with a climate controlled place like this, it’s hard to tell,” Dr. Finney said.

“Let us, or Haggerty and Jones, know as soon as you know, please?” Jamie asked.

“You’ve got it,” the doctor said as they started to bag up the body.

Jamie and Joey split up and started to wander the scene, making notes and taking pictures here and there. A bare footprint in the blood had both of them waving a tech over to measure and preserve the information.

“Marcy is wearing slippers. That may be the murderer’s footprint,” Jamie said.

“Kind of small for a guy,” Joey added.

“I saw that,” Jamie said. A hand waved to him and Jamie turned to see Mike standing by the balcony doors. “Give me a minute. I want to get some air,” he told Joey and made his way to the French doors that led out onto the wide balcony. He closed them behind him and turned to face away from the windows.

“This is risky, Mikey,” he said.

“I know, but look at me,” Mikey said.

Jamie turned, then sucked in a breath. “Marcy Stafford.” The woman was beautiful with thick, honey blonde hair and wide blue eyes. She was dressed in a silky blue dress and matching pumps that made her eyes seem even more blue.

“You’re right, he can see me,” Marcy said to Mike. “Only if you’re holding my hand, though.”

She released Mike’s hand and Jamie looked around. “Yeah, I can’t see you now,” he said.

“That’s just weird,” Jamie whispered. “So...uh...”

Mike shook his head. “It’s not good, Jamie.”

“Katie from next door is the one that killed me. She had been over to watch a movie and I made a comment about how Paul was a good kisser. I thought she knew we had dated before, but were just friends now. She lost her mind. She attacked me and I tried to fight her off. She threw the bottle of wine at me, then started throwing dishes and my statue, whatever she could get her hands on. I ran

into the kitchen to grab a knife to threaten her with. I hoped she'd run out the door." Marcy took a breath and wrapped an arm around herself. "She grabbed the tea kettle off the stove and hit me with it, then grabbed another knife and slashed at me. I slashed back and it went through her shirt and cut her side, and I got scared. She grabbed a second knife and started stabbing me with both of them. I stumbled out into the other room, and that's the last I remember. I came back and all of you are in my home and there's blood everywhere, and I'm *dead*."

"I'm sorry, Marcy. We'll get you justice, I promise," Jamie said to her. "I hope you find peace now."

"You truly promise?" Marcy asked.

"I truly promise," Jamie replied.

"He will," Mike said. "He's one of the best homicide detectives in the state. Go on, Marcy. Go find your family."

"Thank you, Mikey," Marcy said and kissed his cheek, then faded away.

"Holy hell, Mikey," Jamie said. "Your wife...I've got to...how the hell do I prove this?"

"We've got to find the knives. I slipped next door and I think Katie put them in the dishwasher. It's running right now. She's also moving funny, so I think she's hurt worse than she might think," Mike said.

"I'll get Joey to come with me and we'll go next door. I'm sorry, Mike."

"I'm sorry, too – but if she's killing people, then she's not my Katie anymore. She needs help and she needs to be locked away."

"Go keep an eye on her. I'll get Joey as soon as Haggerty or Jones shows up so we can leave the scene. Let me know if she tries to leave?"

"I'll do that," Mike said and disappeared.

Jamie went back inside as the body was being wheeled out.

“Crime Scene techs are going to be here for a few hours now. Let’s take one last look around, then wait in the hall,” Joey said.

Jamie tried to look at the scene now, as Marcy had described it. He found the tea kettle on the floor and asked for it to be dusted. Three knives seemed to be missing from the kitchen knife rack, and Jamie took a picture with his phone so he’d have something to compare. A smear of blood about waist height on Katie was on the door frame and he asked to have that smear checked separately from all of the rest of the blood. The tech looked at him funny, but Jamie just arched a brow and waited for the tech to do as he asked. He stepped out into the hallway and leaned against the wall between the two units and made some notes while he waited for Joey.

“What was all that?” Joey asked.

“A hunch. Did they scan the prints on the kettle?”

“Yeah, they’re Katie’s prints, but that doesn’t mean anything. They lived next door, probably visited each other,” Joey said.

“I want to question her anyway. Let’s go. You knock,” Jamie said. He shifted to stand off to the side where Katie wouldn’t see him right away and nodded to Joey.

Joey gave a couple of firm raps on the door and Katie whipped it open, mid-rant.

“I *told* you to leave me the fuck alone,” she snarled.

“It’s Joe Mahoney, Mrs. Donovan. I need to ask you a couple of questions.”

“I’ve already answered questions,” Katie said.

“And I will make this as quick as possible, but I need to hear your answers for myself. Just let me in for five minutes,” Joey said.

“Fine, come on in,” Katie said as she turned away. “Close the door behind you.”

Joey walked in and Jamie came in behind him, then closed the door.

Katie didn’t turn around until she reached the end of the kitchen counter. When she saw Jamie, she nearly spit. “I didn’t say *he* could come in.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Kennedy’s my partner now - of course he’d come with me,” Joey said and moved to take a seat at the table just past where she stood. Jamie stayed between Katie and the door.

“I’m only speaking to you,” Katie said, then found a seat at the table with Joey. Jamie took a few steps closer so he could see her face, yet still stay between her and the door.

“You look like you’re hurting, Katie. Did you hurt yourself?” Jamie asked.

Katie put a hand to her side, then moved it away as if she realized what she’d done a moment too late. “I bumped into something. I’m fine.”

Jamie turned away while Joey opened his notebook and took out a pen.

“How well did you know Marcy Stafford?” Joey started with the questions while Jamie stepped into the kitchen and opened the dishwasher while it was still in the drying cycle.

It beeped and Katie jumped to her feet. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Getting a clean glass so I can get some water?” Jamie said. “Why, is there a problem?” When at her house with Mike, they never stood on ceremony since they had been in each other’s homes so often, it was natural for him to grab a glass and get water if he was thirsty.

“Oh, well, no. No problem. Just that this isn’t really my place, so I didn’t expect you to be so comfortable,” Katie said.

“Well, it’s kind of your place for as long as you pay for it now, right? Since Paulie’s in prison?” Joey said.

“I guess so. Just don’t make a mess,” Katie warned and sat back down with a wince.

Jamie waited until she couldn’t see what he was doing, and took a couple of pictures with his phone of the three knives laying in the top rack of the dishwasher. He then grabbed one of the dish towels and picked them up without

getting his prints on them. He showed one to Joey from behind Katie's head. Joey's eyes widened and he gave a faint nod before he asked his next question.

"Have you ever been inside Ms. Stafford's place?" Joey asked.

"A few times. We *are* neighbors now, after all," Katie said.

Jamie wrapped the knives up in the dishtowel, then carried them to the door. "Be right back," he called out to Joey. One step outside the apartment and Jamie handed the wrapped knives to one of the patrol officers standing there. "Get those into an evidence bag and over to the techs."

The officer nodded and went into Stafford's place to take care of the knives while Jamie ducked back into Katie's place.

"...she flirted a lot with Paulie, even when she knew we were together," Katie said as Jamie took his position once more against the wall.

"Like you and Paulie when you were with Mikey?" Jamie said and Joe gave him a look.

"Mike was never home. When he was, he would spend time with the kids before he'd pay attention to me. I had to find some comfort somewhere, didn't I?" Katie said.

"Did you? Really?" Jamie asked. He could feel himself getting angry at how much she hurt his friend – even though she waited to let it all come out after Mike was dead.

"Hey, at least I didn't go public until he was dead – although that was just timing, to be frank," Katie said. "I had plans on handing Mike divorce papers this month. Instead? I buried his pathetic ass and got to keep the insurance money and everything. Much better deal."

Jamie curled his fingers into a fist and tucked it behind his back. It would be bad to punch her just before they arrested her ass. Instead, he went over to her and grabbed her upper arm to pull her to her feet. "Katherine Donovan, you need to come down to the station with us for questioning."

“I’m not going anywhere,” Katie yelled as Jamie pushed her against the wall and pulled out his cuffs.

The metal cuffs wrapped her wrists and she kept struggling until Jamie gave her a little shake. “Knock it off. You can walk out of here with your head high, or we can drag you out. Your choice.”

“Where are your keys?” Joey asked. “I’ll make sure we lock the door behind us.”

“They’re in my purse on the table near the door. Just grab my purse. The door locks automatically,” Katie said. “And turn off the lights, would ya? I don’t need to waste electricity.”

Joey grabbed the purse and took Katie from Jamie while he went back into the house and shut off the lights – and looked around while he did. Oh, he didn’t open drawers or cabinets, but he noticed the bloody bandages beside the bathroom sink and bagged one of those for the CSI techs to compare against blood found in the apartment. Lights off, Jamie headed out and made sure the door locked behind him. Joey was standing by the elevator with Katie when Jamie ducked back into the crime scene to hand over the glove-wrapped bloody bandage.

“Dr. Finney, you might want to compare this to any blood found at the scene. It belongs to Katherine Donovan.”

“It was out in the open?” Dr. Finney asked.

“It was. Right beside the bathroom sink when I went in to use the facilities,” Jamie replied.

“Alrighty then. I’ll make sure it’s tagged and added to the collection,” Dr. Finney said.

“Haggerty, we’re taking Mrs. Donovan in for questioning. You want to meet us at the station?” Jamie asked.

“Will do. We’re about done here,” Aidan Haggerty replied. “See you at the station.”

Jamie got into his car and flashed his lights at Joey, then followed him back to the station. “So much for sleep,” Jamie sighed.

“It’s good that you’re going to pass her off to Haggerty and Jones. I wouldn’t have blamed you for punching her in the face, but that would’ve fucked up the arrest and you know it,” Mike said.

Jamie only swerved slightly at the voice suddenly coming from his passenger’s seat. “I must be getting used to you just showing up. I didn’t drive off the road that time.”

“I should probably tell you something about the woman I once called my wife,” Mike said. “She was born Katherine Mary Doylan. Yes, that Doylan family.”

“The ones that own half of the multimedia outlets in North America?” Jamie asked.

“I said yes,” Mike replied. “But her little corner of the empire had their squabbles. She went to an Ivy League college, as expected, but got her degree in Psychology, not medicine, law, journalism, engineering, or any of the other ‘accepted’ degrees. We met in college and when I asked her to marry me, she said I needed to never meet her family. Well, we eventually did meet, when Maureen was born. Katie and I had married at the courthouse when she found out she was pregnant. That was at my insistence. I wanted her to be able to get the benefits of being a cop’s wife if something ever happened to me. I had no idea her family was money until they showed up with enough stuff to stock a toy store. They replaced our crib and half the furniture in our apartment because it wasn’t ‘good enough’ for their grandchild. Her parents took her out one afternoon and when they came back, she handed me the keys to the house they’d just bought us. I was insulted. Did they not think I could provide for my own family?”

“That’s a lot to deal with,” I said.

“I tried to give the house back. They refused. They had it put in Katie’s name, but she insisted it be in mine as well. We lived in it for two years, then sold it and bought the place you’ve been to. Her parents were so angry, they disowned her and never came to meet Kevin. The kids think Katie’s parents are dead. They’re not. They just live out in Westchester county in New York.”

“So, Katie grew up with money. How does that fit now?”

“She began to really miss having money after a few years. You know how much cops make – it’s not enough for private schools and swimming pools, and sixteen different types of lessons for the kids. It’s most definitely not enough for all of that and a full wardrobe update every season.”

“And that turned into resentment?” Jamie asked.

“Resentment I could live with. I just didn’t know she hated me so much,” Mike said.

“Paulie comes from money, too. Obviously. That condo is a million plus, easy. The furniture and art in there? All of it was high end stuff,” Jamie said.

“And Paulie has a gambling problem. He probably blew so much money, he had to work for Saul to pay off his debts,” Mike said.

“So she was going to leave you for Paulie – thinking he had money – and now she’s got his place and your money,” Jamie said.

“And apparently a murder rap. I never would have thought Katie capable of murder, but with me gone, the kids given away, the house being sold, all she had was Paulie. To have him end up in jail, and then for Marcy to have joked about once having been with him – I guess it was too much for Katie and she snapped. She gave up everything to be with Paulie, and then he wasn’t there, and she wasn’t even sure he was ever truly with her.”

“I’m guessing she has some serious abandonment issues from her parents, so this would just make things even worse,” Jamie said.

“I didn’t see it, or maybe I did see it and never fully understood just how mentally fragile she was about things like that. Not sure why I’m beating myself up about this,” Mike said. “It’s not like I planned on leaving her.”

“And yet, she turned around and did the same to your kids,” Jamie said, his voice soft.

“Yeah. At least I know you and Elise will make sure they’re okay,” Mike replied. Jamie pulled into a parking spot and shut off the car. “I’m going to go in there, give Haggerty and Jones the info I have and my suspicions, and then leave.”

“Keep your eyes open. You’ve got more enemies inside than you do out, right now – thanks to Joey.”

“Yeah, I know.” Jamie got out of the car and headed inside. The pain in Mike’s voice resonated the whole time he filled in Haggerty on what he had learned and what he suspected. A hand on his shoulder told Jamie that Aidan Haggerty understood the man was struggling with what he knew.

“Get home and get some sleep, man. Try and relax this weekend, huh? I’ll call you if anything pops on the tests,” Haggerty said.

Chapter Thirteen

Jamie got his motorcycle out of storage and took a ride up the coast to a cabin his cousin owned in Maine. He spent the weekend fishing on the lake, reading in front of a fire in the wood stove, and eating really good steaks and fresh fish he cooked in a cast iron pan on that stove. He thought about the case a lot, but he did his best to *not* think about it while he relaxed. He rode back late Sunday night, showered and fell asleep, not bothering with news or updates until Monday morning when he headed in to work.

That was his excuse for not knowing how much had blown up over the weekend, and Jamie was sticking to it. He'd brought coffee and breakfast burritos for himself and Joey, set Joe's on his desk and sat down to check on cases when Sarge stuck his head into his office.

"Kennedy, you're here," Sarge said as he closed the door behind himself.

"I'm here, boss. You said days as of today, right?" Jamie asked, confused.

"Yeah, I did. You're not late or anything," Sarge said and pulled Joey's chair to the side to sit. "Mahoney won't be in today. He won't be back until Wednesday. Took three personal days to handle something."

"Oh, well, want a coffee and a couple of breakfast burritos?" Jamie asked.

“You sure? I’d love ‘em. Didn’t get anything yet today,” Sarge said and pulled the food closer. He spoke around mouthfuls of food. “Have you been updated on anything yet?”

“No, sir. I just sat down when you came in.”

“Well, Mrs. Donovan is now awaiting sentencing for the murder of Marcy Stafford. Not sure how you figured it out, but her blood was on the door, her fingerprints on the kettle – and when the lab got ahold of those knives, they found Mrs. Donovan’s and Ms. Stafford’s blood inside the hilts. Once she heard we had blood evidence and fingerprints, Mrs. Donovan spilled the whole story and confessed.”

“That cut on her side and the way she was acting made me suspicious, so I went back to look and found things that didn’t fit the pattern,” Jamie said, fingers crossed under the desk that Sarge would believe him.

“Her lawyer asked to have a packet of paperwork delivered to you. He said it’s the deed to the house and contact information for the real estate group handling the sale. Once it’s sold, she wants the money to go to Elise for the kids. I’ve got it locked in the safe in my office. Come by and grab it when you get a moment,” Sarge said.

“Will do. So, Joey’s okay?” Jamie asked.

“Yeah, I hope so. Friday night when you brought Mrs. Donovan in, I’d already left for the day. Iverson, Denney, and a couple of patrol cops whose names I don’t care to know – jumped Mahoney in the parking lot. They told him that they knew he was the dirty cop, not Paulie, because Paulie was their friend, and told him he’d better set things right or they’d fix it for him. He went to the ER for a few stitches and they called me to let me know one of mine was in the hospital.”

“Damn, I should’ve stuck around,” Jamie said as he slumped back in the chair.

“No, it’s not on you. Iverson and Denney are suspended, pending an investigation. They’re facing charges and possible jail time – and they are already getting fired. It’s a whole process. The two patrol officers have already been fired. Anyway, I need you to talk to Mahoney and try and get him to stay on. He’s talking about quitting and starting up a PI firm or something. He’s probably right in that they’ll never look at him with trust again – I can’t force people to believe the truth. I just don’t want to lose yet another good detective.”

“And I lose yet another partner. I’m not a fan of that, either. There aren’t many guys left that I want to partner with, to be honest.”

“Well, with all of the purging I’ve been doing, I’ll have a few new hires – and no, they won’t all be rookies. I’ll make sure you’re paired with someone with experience, if you can’t get Mahoney to stay on.”

“Gee, Sarge, I think you might like me,” Jamie teased wryly.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself, Kennedy,” Sarge said as he got to his feet. “Thanks for breakfast. Get your paperwork done, then come pick up the papers and go home. You can do your paperwork and admin stuff from home the next few days. No point in trying to find someone to partner you with when everyone’s acting like a toddler.”

“Just don’t dock my pay, boss. I need every penny if I’m getting out of that apartment anytime soon,” Jamie replied.

“You do more work from home than half my guys do from the office. Don’t worry, Kennedy. You’re covered,” Sarge said and left him to get to work.

Mike perched on the abandoned chair. “Close the door.”

“And the blinds,” Jamie said as he got up and did both. “You heard?” he asked Mike as he dropped back into his seat and reached for his coffee.

“I heard. I went and checked on Joey, too. He looks like shit. I suggest bringing over some take-out and cheering him up.”

“I planned on showing up with lunch for him and talking to him. How’s Katie doing?”

“You’re assuming I checked up on her,” Mike said.

“I know you did. I know you, remember?”

“She’s in the prison hospital. She needed the knife wound cleaned and stitched inside and out. They’re watching for infection now. She looks so...broken,” Mike said.

“Elise sent me an e-mail. Said your father moved down to the Keys, bought the house next door and is in the process of buying the one Elise and the kids are in, so they can all stay where they are. Elise says he’s been a great help with the kids – all four of them now call him Grampa.”

“I’m glad to hear that. I went and checked on him a couple of times. Saw that he was boxing up the place. He’s been talking about selling the old house for five years, since Mom died,” Mike said. “I think my death was the last straw for him to stay up here. The kids will keep him motivated and feeling young.”

“Elise said he loves the warm weather and he swims every day. I think it’ll be good for all of them for him to be there. Maureen and Kevin have blood family nearby and Elise isn’t trying to navigate four kids on her own. My kids don’t remember what it’s like to have a grandparent, so it’ll be good for them, too.”

“I don’t think Katie was involved in my murder,” Mike said.

“I don’t think so, either. Your death was beneficial, financially – but the way she said it,” Jamie shook his head. “She was going to serve you with divorce papers. Why would she spend the time and money on a divorce if she planned on just killing you and blaming it on Nicky Carrera? That makes absolutely zero sense.”

“You said her reaction when you told her I was dead was real,” Mike said.

“It was primal,” Jamie said as he remembered the howl of pain he heard her make in the bathroom.

“So we’re back to some basic questions,” Mike said. “My murder, Nicky’s murder – how are they connected and why are we both dead?”

Jamie bit inside his cheek, then sighed. “Okay, I have to ask it. Did you see Nicky or Tony Carrera over *there*?”

“Over there? You mean, in the Shadow Lands? No. I think they both moved on to whatever reward awaited them.”

“I’ve avoided asking you about it, but my curiosity is strong. Can you tell me anything about what being dead is like?” Jamie asked.

“It’s weird,” Mike said. “I miss the sensations more than anything. The feel of a hug or holding someone’s hand, the smell of coffee, the taste of a cold beer, the comfort of my favorite hoodie and sweatpants – those are all the things I miss the most. I’m never tired, but I can run out of energy and need to just float for a bit. I don’t ever sleep any more, so no dreams.”

“What about that sense of urgency you were feeling before the funeral?”

“That’s gone. I can get angry, or feel joy, but my emotions need to be extremes for me to even notice them.”

“So, how do you feel about the whole Katie situation?” Jamie asked.

“Sad, surprised, confused – mostly I feel sad for my kids that their mother turned out to be such a broken person – and I’m not with them to help them deal. I can’t tell you enough how grateful I am that Elise loves my kids as much as she loves her own.”

“I need to get a move on, or I’ll be bringing ‘second dinner’ to Joey’s place. Where are you going to be?” Jamie asked.

“I’m going to go check on Katie again, then take a moment and go see what Pops and the kids are up to. I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?” Mike said.

“Sure thing,” Jamie replied as he finished packing up his stuff and locking things down. He made sure to grab files and his laptop, and stacked everything in a file box because it wouldn’t fit in his regular messenger bag.

He got the office door open, but struggled a bit with his hands full. One of the other detectives got up and held the door for him so he could get everything clear of it.

“Thanks, Ellerson,” Jamie said.

“No problem, Kennedy,” Ellerson replied. “Here, hand me that box so you can lock up.”

Jamie handed it over and locked the office door, then turned and took the box back. “Thanks. See you in a couple of days.”

“Hey, Kennedy? I’m sorry you’re having to deal with all the backlash from the guys over Mahoney. It’s not on you at all, y’know?”

“He’s my partner now, Ellerson. It *is* on me. Do you all *really* think I’d be working with the guy responsible for Michael Donovan’s death? Or Paul Giannetti’s arrest? No fucking way. So, maybe you all are the ones that need to figure out what’s what,” Jamie said as he turned and headed for the door.

Someone called out, “Maybe he’s got you fooled?”

Jamie whirled and slammed the box down on a file cabinet. “That’s *enough*! I’m not a sucker, and you know it. I’m the detective you come to when you’re stuck, remember? I’m the one that has helped each and every one of you with your cases, even when I’m juggling my own case load. But you *really* think I’m clueless enough to be working with someone day in and day out, that would be responsible for my best friend’s murder? Fuck you *all* if you think that’s true.”

No one said a word as he punched the button for the elevator and waited for it to take him down to the garage.

Not one word.



A large bag of Thai food in one hand and a six-pack of Joey's favorite beer in the other had Jamie 'knocking' on Joey's door with the toe of his shoe. He waited a couple of minutes, then tapped again. "Joey, it's me, Jamie. I've got food. Let me in, man," Jamie called out.

He heard shuffling behind the door, then it opened and he heard Joey's voice come from behind it. "Come on in. Excuse the mess," Joey said.

Jamie stepped in and blinked, the darkness of the house compared to the evening light outside made him blind for a moment. A hand reached out and took the beer from his hand. "I'll take this."

"Can we turn on a light?" Jamie asked. "I can't see a damned thing."

A click and the light filled the room to propel Jamie forward. "That's better, thanks. Thai food and your favorite beer sound like something you're interested in?"

"What are they saying about me at the station?" Joey asked.

"Sarge is freaking out about you possibly leaving the force," Jamie said as he put the bag of food down in the kitchen. "I told him you probably just needed a break."

"No, I already surrendered my gun and badge," Joey said. He put two plates down on the counter and helped Jamie unpack the food.

"I think he's hoping you'll come in and ask for them back," Jamie replied. "I know I am. You're an excellent cop and I want you as my partner."

"So, quit the force and come work with me," Joey said as they sat on stools at the counter to eat. "Resolute Investigations, LLC was filed today. I'm going to look for office space this week."

They passed containers back and forth as they ate and Jamie took a few bites before he spoke again. "If this is such a great thing, starting up your own business – why the hell do you look like someone died and you're two steps from sucking on the end of your gun?"

“Because it feels like the assholes won,” Joey said. “I left because they wouldn’t trust me. I couldn’t be responsible for you ending up dead, too – and I most certainly didn’t want to die. If we don’t get backup, support, or cover – we could end up dead too easily. I don’t want to go out like that.”

“And neither do I, but that’s not going to happen,” Jamie said.

“Really. How do you know this?”

“Because I’ve got your back, Joseph Xavier Mahoney, just as much as you have mine. Once the case is settled, with Paulie and Katie in prison, when the tangles are smoothed out and presented for all and sundry to see? There will be no question that you are innocent of everything they suspect.”

“And yet there will *always* be a question in the back of their minds. Just how *did* Giannetti do what he did and Mahoney never knew? Is he that much of an idiot? Or was he complicit?”

Jamie had to admit there was truth in that. “So, you’re going to let them win? Give it all up and walk away?”

“I look at it as me taking the win,” Joey said. “I’ll get my partial retirement package and benefits, and I get to start my own business while I’m still young enough to do well at PI work.”

They ate in silence for a few minutes while Jamie processed what Joey had said. Finally, he lifted his beer bottle and held it out to Joey. “To new beginnings.”

Joey lifted his bottle and tapped it against Jamie’s. “To new beginnings.”

Chapter Fourteen

Jamie worked from home the next two days, then went and picked up Joey. He'd secured Joey's promise of help with getting the stuff out of the Donovan house, and they really needed to get moving so the house could be shown and sold. They pulled up to the house with the moving truck and backed it up to the garage door. Katie said most of the kid's stuff was stacked in the garage, but Jamie wanted to take a look around and find any photos or mementos the kids might appreciate as they got older.

Jamie unlocked the house and went through the kitchen to the garage to unlock the door and open it up. They found the boxes labeled for the kids right in the middle of the space.

"Do we take their bikes and skateboards, too?" Joey asked.

"Yeah, we can put it all in one of those pods later and ship it down to them. Let's load up anything that looks like theirs," Jamie said.

While Joey got started on that, Jamie found a few flat boxes. He taped one together and carried it into the living room. The family Bible with the births, deaths, and marriages went into the box first. Then Katie and Mike's wedding album and the baby photo albums for each kid that had sat on a shelf next to the TV. He found framed photos piled on the dining room table, and wrapped each

one as he packed them. In the master bedroom closet, he found Mike's dress blues and Katie's wedding gown, both outfits preserved in plastic. He took all of Mike's ties and his favorite sweatshirts and put them in a duffel bag. The kids rooms were stripped bare and their closets were empty, so he hoped Katie had just boxed up everything. Each time he filled a box, he brought it out to the garage door and Joey would take it over to the truck.

"I think I've got everything the kids might eventually want. I got all of the photo albums and framed stuff that I could find," Jamie said as he carried the last box out and slid it into the back of the truck.

Joey had a tool box open on the shelf at the side of the garage. "I found a couple of smaller tool boxes and I'm putting together a kit for each one of the kids. There are a ton of tools here, but the cabinet is bolted to the wall, so we can't just load that up."

"You still good with loading this into your garage for a few days until I can arrange payment for a shipping pod?" Jamie asked.

"Yeah, no problem. No point in renting a storage unit for a week or two of boxes sitting around," Joey replied.

Jamie looked at his phone and sighed. "Crap, I need to get this truck back in like an hour and a half. Want to come help me unload it and then you can come back and I'll return it and join you here? Anything that's left we can put in your pickup, right?"

"Sounds like a plan," Joey said. He closed the garage door and got into the truck while Jamie locked up the house.

Midway through the unloading at Joey's, Jamie's phone went off. He got into the cab of the truck to take the call so Joey wouldn't hear.

"Ms. Popov, why are you calling? Are you okay?" Jamie asked.

"I'm fine, Jameson. I wanted to check on you. I heard that your partner quit the force. That's not good, is it?" Drina said.

“It’s not, but I understand why he did it. Trust is a big part of policing,” Jamie replied. “I’m in the middle of something, can I call you later?”

“You may, but I wanted to hear for myself that you were okay.”

“I’m fine. Just picked up a load of stuff from Michael’s house for his kids. I’m storing it for a few days before I ship it out to them. In fact, I need to hurry to return the truck so Joey can go back and get the last couple of things. I’ll give you a call in a couple of hours?”

“I will wait for your call. Don’t worry, Jameson. I have your back.”

The call disconnected and Jamie shook his head. “Weird lady,” he muttered, then got out to help finish up.

Joey closed the back of the truck and locked up his garage. He took the Donovan’s house keys from Jamie and got into his truck. “I’ll see you back at Mike’s when you’re done. Then we’re going for steaks, on me.”

“That sounds like a plan, my friend,” Jamie replied as he got into the truck. It didn’t take him long to drop off the moving truck, get into his car and head over to the house. He didn’t want to block Joey’s truck in the drive, so he found a spot on the street a couple of houses down and walked up. A couple of raps on the garage door and Joey let him in, then closed it down again.

“It’s getting dark, we don’t need to advertise what’s still in here,” Joey said. “I put some of the power tools and a few things into my truck already. Got a few things for you and me in there. I’m just making sure I didn’t miss anything. Seems a waste to just sell off and throw out whatever’s left.”

“I’m going to go inside and make sure I didn’t miss anything either. Give me a yell when you’re done,” Jamie replied as he headed inside.

In the owner’s suite, Jamie went through the dresser once more. He found a ring box with an antique opal ring inside and tucked it in his pocket. Maureen would appreciate that some day. He dug up a couple of loose photos, and then pulled

out the Harbor PD sweatshirt Mike liked to wear when they played basketball. That one, he would keep for himself.

“I’m glad you found that,” Mike said.

Jamie slammed a drawer shut as Mike startled him. “What have I said to you about not scaring me into a heart attack?”

“Sorry it took me a while to catch up to you. Elise and Dad and the kids are all good. I’ve not popped in on someone that far from my bones before and it took me a while to come back around. I’m glad I caught you before you left, though. There’s a secret I need to show you, so you can get the stuff out of there. Even Katie didn’t know about this.”

“Okay?”

“In my closet, on the left side, near the floor, there’s a loose panel in the wall,” Mike said.

Jamie got down on the floor and pulled a few shoes and odds and ends out of the way, then started to tap on the wall to find the panel.

“Up a little more, to the right...right there,” Mike said as Jamie tapped a spot that had a flap of loose wallpaper.

“Pull the paper up, stick your finger in the hole, and pull,” Mike said.

Jamie popped the panel off and found an old metal cash box inside. “Is this what you meant?”

“That’s it. There’s also a cloth bag underneath it, down between the studs. Get that, too.”

Jamie pulled both things out, fit the panel back, and backed out of the closet. “I smell smoke,” he said as he stood in the room.

Mike disappeared as Jamie wrapped the box and bag up in the sweatshirt, then stuffed it all into an old backpack along with the photos he’d found. Before he finished zipping the bag shut, Mike was back in the room.

“You’ve gotta get out, the house is on fire,” Mike said.

“Where’s Joey?” Jamie asked.

“He’s here? I’ll go look,” Mike said. Jamie opened the bedroom door and a cloud of smoke rushed in. Coughing hard, he went back into the master bath and soaked a towel, then wrapped it around his head. He put the backpack on and went out into the hall again.

“He’s lying in the garage, unconscious. Someone hit him on the head,” Mike said.

“I need to get him out,” Jamie replied, and started down the stairs and towards the door that led into the garage.

“You’re not going to make it that way. The whole kitchen is in flames,” Mike said. “Go out the back and break the glass in the back entrance to the garage, you can get him that way. There’s a crowbar jammed into the gears of the lift door.”

Jamie turned towards the family room near the back of the house and got out the window, then ran a round to the back entrance. It was painted shut, but a few hard kicks had it broken open. He ran into the garage, the smoke making it hard to see anything. “Where is he?” he yelled at Mike.

“To your left about five steps, then reach down,” Mike said.

Jamie followed Mike’s instructions and found Joey’s shirt in his fist. He patted the body on the floor until he reached his shoulders, then grabbed him under his armpits and dragged him towards the back door.

Once out in the cool night air, Jamie kept going until they were in the middle of the back yard before he collapsed on the grass. The house was fully involved now and Jamie could hear sirens in the distance. His head was pounding and his throat ached from breathing in the smoke, but he was more worried for Joey. The towel he’d had wrapped around his face, he now pressed to the wound in the back of Joey’s head and made sure his friend was breathing. Shallow breaths and a thready pulse told Jamie his friend was in rough shape. He pulled out his phone

and dialed 911. “Officer down,” Jamie rasped. “We’re in the back yard of 9683 Cavendish. The house is on fire. I can hear sirens, but we need medics.”

“An ambulance is on the way. Can you get to the front yard?” the operator asked.

“I don’t want to move him anymore than I have to. He has a bleeding head injury. I dragged him out of the burning building, but I don’t want to make it worse,” Jamie said.

“Understood. They should be there any minute now. I’ve let the firefighters know you’re in the back. Were there any other people inside?”

“We were the only two I know of. It’s my friend’s house and we were packing up things for his kids before they sold it. If anyone else was in there, I never heard them.” Jamie coughed hard and wheezed as he held the phone.

“Hang on, detective. The ambulance just arrived. They should be with you shortly,” the operator said. *“Go ahead and hang up when you see them.”*

“Thank you,” Jamie rasped, then disconnected the call as he saw a section of the fence between the neighbor’s yard and this one come down and two medics rush through. Jamie waved his phone in the air, then shoved it in his pocket when they rushed over to them.

“Joseph Mahoney,” Jamie said as he pointed to Joey. “Someone hit him on the back of the head. I found him unconscious and dragged him out of the burning house.” The two medics started to check out Joey and Jamie coughed hard again. One of them pulled out an oxygen mask and small tank and pressed it to Jamie’s face.

“Here, detective. Breathe with this for a bit. You hurt anywhere?”

Jamie shook his head and sucked in the oxygen. He watched as they worked over Joey, then backed out of the way when they slid him onto the back board and got ready to carry him to the ambulance.

“Are you able to walk?” the medic asked Jamie.

“Yeah, I can walk. Don’t worry about me, just take care of Joey.” Jamie followed them across the yard and through the fence where they lay the board on a gurney and strapped Joey down. They jogged towards the ambulance and Jamie stopped at the back of it to glance at the house as the fire raged. They’d almost died in that house tonight, and he knew it was not an accident.

The medic called out to him and Jamie climbed in the back as the doors shut. He saw Mike’s ghost standing on the lawn, staring at the burning house, hands shoved into his front pockets as he watched the place he’d lived with his family, crash and burn.

Whoever was responsible? Jamie would see that they paid.

Chapter Fifteen

They kept Jamie and Joey overnight for observation, but they were both released the next day. The only reason they let Joey out was because Jamie said he'd make sure he was never alone and someone would be monitoring him constantly. The concussion Joey had would have kept him in the hospital another day or two, but Dai was home and had shown up at the hospital last night. Jamie had texted him from Joey's phone, and let him know what had happened.

"How did you know to reach out to Dai?" Joey asked as they sat in Dai's car while he pushed the wheelchair back inside.

"I had your phone in my pocket and I saw a notification that Dai had landed at the airport. Not sure if you had planned on getting him or not, I sent him a text that you were in the hospital but they said you were going to be okay," Jamie said.

Dai slid into the driver's seat and glanced over at Joey. "I'm so glad you're okay," he whispered.

"You're welcome," Jamie chirped from the back seat and they all laughed.

"Don't worry, boyo. I'll thank ya properly later. You sure you're okay to drive?" Dai asked Jamie, his gaze meeting through the rear-view mirror.

“I’m fine. I just breathed in too much smoke and they wanted to make sure I was coughing up the gunk and not getting worse,” Jamie replied. “I’m hoping Joey’s truck is okay.”

“Yeah, well, I parked it halfway down the driveway because I had the garage door open for a while until it got dark. Too close to the door and there’s no breeze,” Joey said.

They all fell silent as they approached the ruins of the house. A fire department SUV sat parked next to Joey’s truck – which had a few soot marks and scratches, but was otherwise fine. They saw two figures moving around in the mess and pulled over. Jamie got out and leaned in the window. “Give me the spare keys and I’ll move your truck out of their way, Joe. I’ll put the stuff in my car and you can come pick this up when you feel better.”

Joey handed Jamie the keys and leaned back in the seat. “Thanks, Jamie. Call if you need anything, huh?”

“You, too. Take care of him, Dai,” Jamie said and waved as they drove off.

Jamie headed up the driveway and waved to the two men. “Hello, I’m Detective Kennedy. I was here last night.”

“Hello, detective. I’m Captain Stanislaus, and this is Lieutenant Jacobs. We’re with the Fire Investigation Task Force. Did you know of anything that might have been running or turned on while you and Detective Mahoney were here?”

“Other than a few lights? No, nothing. In fact, I unplugged the televisions we didn’t pack up because we weren’t sure which ones we would be taking until I looked up the models on my phone to know which were the newer ones,” Jamie said.

“Taking stuff?” Jacobs asked.

“Yes, we were packing up things to ship to the kids. Their mother signed the property over to me to handle the dispersion of the contents and sale so I could get the funds to her children. My ex-wife is their guardian now,” Jamie said.

“And you thought maybe you’d burn it down instead?” Jacobs asked.

“Hey, back off, Jacobs,” Stanislaus said. “He’s a cop. He’s on our side.” Stanislaus turned back to Jamie. “Besides, Kennedy’s partner nearly got killed in the fire. How’s Mahoney doing?”

“He’s going home to recuperate. Had a pretty nasty concussion and about twenty five stitches in the back of his head. I almost died getting him out of this place, so watch your mouth about accusing us of anything,” Jamie replied.

“Ignore Jacobs,” Stanislaus said. “He’s kind of a dick.”

Jacobs gave them both the finger and walked around the side of the property.

“Seriously, he’s a dick,” Stanislaus said. “But we found where accelerant was used in three different spots. Whoever set this? They didn’t want anyone getting out. How *did* you get out?”

“I went out the window in the back, out of the family room, then kicked the painted over door in the back of the garage until it smashed and dragged Joey out that way,” Jamie said. “We collapsed in the middle of the back yard, then the medics came through the fence and got us out into the ambulance.”

“Does it surprise you that someone tried to kill you?” Stanislaus asked.

“No, not really. I mean – yeah, I wasn’t expecting it, but my partner, Michael Donovan, was killed a couple of weeks ago and this was his house.”

“So maybe someone was just adding a final insult to injury?” Stanislaus asked.

“Maybe. Or maybe they were trying to kill Joey. He just quit the force because of the crap he’s had to deal with since his partner got arrested. I have about six different possible theories and no suspects,” Jamie said. “Speaking of which, can I move Joey’s truck out of your way? I have to move the stuff in the truck into my car anyway.”

“Sure, you can move it,” Stanislaus said. “Here’s my card. If you think of anything, give me a call?”

“I will. Thanks, Captain,” Jamie said and went to get in the truck. He started it up and carefully backed out, then found a spot near where his car was parked and pulled in there. He made sure it was locked up, then proceeded to shift the tools and totes from the truck to the back of his car. It almost didn’t all fit, but he stacked the last two boxes in the front passenger seat, then headed to Joey’s place. This much stuff wouldn’t fit in his place, so he’d just put it in the garage and drop off the truck keys at the same time.

Once that was done, he headed home and the idea of a shower and his own bed – yes, bed – kept him from just pulling over and sleeping in the car. The mattress was no longer on the floor, so he could call it a bed now and it was comfy. He got inside, reset the alarm, and dropped the backpack from last night on the floor inside his bedroom door. Wallet, keys, and the ring box were set on his dresser, then he peeled off his clothes and dropped them right into the washer. They smelled of ash and smoke, and he’d wash them first before he decided if they were salvageable or not.

The shower felt better than any shower should, and he swiped a towel over himself, then fell into bed, asleep before he pulled up the covers. He woke about ten hours later with the vague sense of something being ‘off’. Something niggled at the back of his mind, but when he tried to grasp it, it slipped away.

“Food. I need to eat, then maybe it’ll come to me,” Jamie said to himself. He pulled on sweatpants and padded into the kitchen. Thai food leftovers dumped in a bowl, then heated up in the microwave made for a pretty good meal. It didn’t pair well with the orange juice he downed, but it wasn’t bad with milk. He sat at the table, staring into space as he ate and woke up a bit more.

“You okay?” Mike asked, and Jamie let out a breath.

“At least this time I didn’t jump,” Jamie said. “Yeah, I’m okay. Just trying to clear my head a bit. Something’s bugging me but I can’t figure out what it is.”

“Want to talk it out?” Mike asked.

“The investigators said the fire was arson. They found accelerant sprayed in more than one place,” Jamie said. “My car was down the street, so the arsonist was either going after Joey, or wanted a final ‘fuck you’ to you and yours.”

“I’m thinking they were after Joey,” Mike said.

“But who would be after Joey? The only people harassing him right now are cops. They may really hate him, but burn *your* house down to get at him? No. They’re mad at him for what they think is his complicity in your murder.”

“Maybe one of Paulie’s friends?”

“Maybe. I could go ask him if he’s sent anyone after Joey. Not that he’d tell me. But if I tell Paulie that Joe’s no longer a cop, he could get the word out and maybe that will take some of the pressure off?” Jamie leaned back and sighed.

“I’m just spitballing here. I don’t have a clue.”

“If you get the word out that Joey’s no longer a cop, that could also escalate things since he no longer has the blue wall protecting him,” Mike said. “There’s one good thing, okay, well, two. You got all of the important stuff out of the house – and now you don’t have to worry about selling it. Insurance payout can go to the kids. The insurance company will clear the lot of the debris once the arson investigators are done, and the lot will sell fast in that neighborhood. A lot less hassle for you.”

“Not how I wanted it to go down, though,” Jamie said. “Not even close.”

“I know,” Mike replied. “But it is what it is, right?”

“Hey, what’s in that metal box and bag I pulled out of your closet?” Jamie asked.

“The bag has my Dad’s old service revolver in it. I’d like you to put that in your safe and maybe pass it on to Kevin someday. I know you grabbed the ring box in the drawer – that opal was my great-grandma’s ring – Dad’s mom. That’s been put aside for Maureen since the day she was born.”

“And the box?”

“That’s a little more complicated. There are bonds and trust papers in there. Katie didn’t know I saved them all. She tried to burn them and I pulled them out of the papers and photos she torched when her parents disowned her. The bearer bonds are for whoever holds them. The trust papers are for Maureen and ‘baby number two’, that her parents gave us when Maureen was born. Katie had always said she only wanted two children, so they set up trusts for two children. I took the papers to the bank after Kevin was born and had his name put on his trust. When they’re eighteen, each one gets a pretty substantial amount. Last time I looked, it was over two million. Each.”

“Well there’s college, trade school, or getting set up in their own home and business for each of them. I’ll go put the box, ring, and gun in my safe for now. Tomorrow, I’ll go put it all in a safe deposit box at the bank.”

“I want you to keep the bearer bonds. You’ll need funds to ship the stuff to Florida, and you have more than earned the rest. I want you to use it to get yourself a place, maybe invest in Joey’s business – whatever you can do to help set yourself up a little more comfortably,” Mike said.

“I don’t know if I feel comfortable with that,” Jamie said.

“So, take enough to pay for the shipping so my kids have their bikes and the things that will make it feel more like home for them, then decide about the rest later. I really want you to have it, though.”

“I’ll think about it,” Jamie said as he got up to clean up his dishes. “Is Marcy Stafford still around?”

“No, she moved on as soon as Katie was arrested.”

“Are you going to move on once we solve your case?”

“I don’t know,” Mike said. “I kind of like being able to keep an eye on everyone and help you out in ways a live partner could not.”

“You know Sarge is going to give me another live partner pretty soon. I’m going to have to work pretty hard at not having them think I’m a nut case if you’re still

around helping out.”

“Eh, you’ll do fine,” Mike said as he followed Jamie into the bedroom and watched him put the gun in the safe, then open the box and look at the contents before he put them in his safe.

“Uh, Mike?” Jamie said. “You ever add up the value of these bearer bonds?”

“No, I just shoved them in the box and put them away. Figured when the kids were closer to college, I’d see what I had.”

“I’m *really* not comfortable with keeping all of this. I’ll make sure Elise has a good portion of this money,” Jamie said. “Because we’re talking almost five million dollars. See? There’s the maturity date – more than ten years ago – and the value amount. At least we’re lucky in that this corporation still exists.”

“Huh. I really had no idea. Imagine, if I did, I’d probably still be married to Katie and she’d be happily banging anyone and everyone while I worked.” Mike’s tone of voice shifted to anger. “Fuck her and her greedy bitch ways. You keep half, give Elise half, and call it a stupidity tax for having to deal with my lunatic wife and my ghostly ass.”

Jamie just shook his head and put it all in the safe for now. That much money? That was life changing money. That was...he stopped and turned back to Mike. “Are you *sure* no one else knew about this money? Because this is kill-worthy money.”

“Well, if anyone knew about it, they will assume it’s burnt to ash in the house. Don’t worry, you’re safe.”

“How do I explain how I got it? I mean, if it was in your house, then it belongs to Katie,” Jamie said.

“And if I gave it to you to secure for me before I died, then it’s yours,” Mike said. “Besides, Katie signed the house and it’s contents over to you. Whatever was in it, is yours. That means, the box and all of its contents – is yours.”

“Okay, *that* I can live with. I just don’t want it to be underhanded or anything,” Jamie said.

“Why don’t you talk to Andras Baros? That guy that helped us with that bank fraud thing that got the manager murdered? He was helpful, smart, and seemed like a decent guy,” Mike said.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. I’ll give him a call tomorrow,” Jamie said. “I mean, I don’t think these are even a *thing* anymore. They may not be worth anything, or maybe as a collector’s item type of thing. If they’re really worth this much? I’ll make sure most of it goes to Elise, your Dad, and the kids.”

“I’m going to go check around the house site and the fire station, see if they say anything more when they think they’re alone. You look like you could use more sleep,” Mike said.

Jamie glanced at the clock, saw that it was in the wee hours of the morning, and nodded. “Yeah, I think I’ll do that. I slept most of the day away, but I still feel tired.”

“You didn’t sleep much at the hospital, so you’re still catching up on over twenty-four hours without sleep. Go crash. I’ll wake you up if I learn something useful,” Mike said.

Jamie grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge, shut off the lights, and got back into bed. He still hadn’t remembered what was bugging him, and hoped maybe he’d remember it in the morning. Alarm set for eight, he rolled over and went back to sleep.

Chapter Sixteen

Dmitri Popov watched his sister pace the length of the library, cursing him with every step.

"You idiot," Drina seethed. "You stick your nose in *my* business and nearly get the wrong person killed. What were you thinking, Dmitri?"

"I was thinking that this is *my* inheritance to use, not yours. I was thinking that you're getting ahead of yourself, Alexandrina, and you are letting your heart rule your head."

Drina lifted her chin and glared at her brother. "I am the eldest, Dmitri. It is *mine*. Not yours. We're not in the ancient days where women could not hold power. Then again, I'd love to see you tell Grandmama Irina that she had no power. I doubt even *you* are that much of an imbecile."

"Careful, sister. You will find my patience does have its limits," Dmitri hissed.

"Who did you have go do it?"

"Peter Ivanovich. He's who Papa always uses for arson. Why reinvent the wheel, eh?"

"Thank you. You are dismissed," Drina said to her brother.

"Excuse me?"

"Leave me. I have work to do, and I cannot do it with your presence tainting the air."

"This is not your house yet, Alexandrina. I won't warn you to watch your mouth again."

"You do not live here, Dmitri. I do, as does Maxim and Papa. Please, get out."

Dmitri drained the glass of good bourbon before he put the crystal down on a side table and stormed from the room. He had been waiting to see if his father would wake long enough to speak to him, but this was not a good day. Okay, it had been a little good because he got to irritate his sister, but that was not the purpose of his visit. He'd try again tomorrow.

Drina waited until she saw Dmitri's car go through the gates before she let out a breath of relief. He had almost blown her whole plan sky high with his impetuosity. She pressed a button on the control panel at the side of the desk, and spoke. "Send in Sebastian, please."

The man that entered looked entirely average. Brown hair, brown eyes, light brown skin, khaki pants, hiking boot-type shoes, a plaid button down shirt, and navy blue windbreaker jacket.

"Sebastian, thank you for joining me," Drina said as she sat down behind the desk.

"Of course, ma'am. I serve at your pleasure," Sebastian replied.

"The timetable has to be adjusted. Dmitri is getting arrogant and needs to be addressed. I also want Peter Ivanovich removed from our roster. Papa will not last the week, so this needs to be done with haste."

"I will see that all is done to your satisfaction," Sebastian replied. "You can rely on me."

"I know that, which is why you continue to serve. I look forward to your report," Drina said.

Sebastian gave her a little bow of his head, then turned and left the room.

Drina picked up the wine glass she had poured before Dmitri had come in, and took a swallow of the fine vintage. That Doylan woman had almost ruined everything, but Giannetti's greed and stupidity, combined with Katie's abandonment issues had taken care of that mess all by itself. Between the two of them and that idiot Carrera, this whole plan had been rewritten twice.

Carrera had wanted them to suffer for his son's arrest and subsequent beating in prison, but his goons had escalated the situation. That meant Carrera and his morons had to be punished. It wasn't her doing, but Drina couldn't say she was unhappy that Carrera was dead. She'd had a particular fondness for Michael Donovan and his death made her a little testy. Then she'd challenged Jameson Kennedy, and he was every bit as good, if not better, than Donovan. Truly good men needed to be protected these days. There were so few of them.

Just look at her brother, Dmitri. He was most definitely *not* a good man. He beat his wife, cheated on her, and ignored his children. He raised his hand to her – once. He knew better than to even consider that possibility again. She took his little finger for that first offense. If there was a second, she would be taking a different appendage. Eh, after Sebastian was done with him, her sister-in-law would be grateful for the respite.

Now, if she could just be sure that Jameson Kennedy wouldn't end up dead before she tied this all up in a big red bow for him. It was so *exhausting* being this Machiavellian some days.



"Jamie, wake up," Mike said. "Jamie!"

"Huh? What?" Jamie grumbled as he rolled over. "What?"

"Wake up. It's almost eight in the morning and I have news for you."

"Dammit, Mike," Jamie sighed. "I had the alarm set for eight. You couldn't wait?" He rolled over and shut off the alarm on his phone, then sat up. "Give me a few minutes. I want to wash up and get coffee so my brain starts functioning."

Mike was seated on the kitchen table when Jamie came out of the bathroom, looking a little more alert. "I'd have started the coffee for you, but I haven't figured out how to do that from this side, yet," Mike said.

Jamie put a cup on the machine, snapped in a pod, then hit the button. "Now, see? If you could work the coffee pot and the microwave, I'd let you move in for sure," he teased. The cup was retrieved, that first magical sip taken and he sighed. "Okay, what did you need to wake me up for?"

"Dmitri Popov died in a single vehicle accident this morning," Mike said.

Jamie looked vague. "Who's that?"

"Alexandrina Popov's next youngest sibling. Now there's just Drina and Maxim left. Max is maybe ten? His mother disappeared when he was three, and it's suspected Alexei had her disposed of. She was Alexei's third – and last – wife."

"And this couldn't wait another forty-five minutes?"

"He was on his phone when the accident happened, talking to a Peter Ivanovich. Mr. Ivanovich was also found dead this morning, but time of death is hard to pin down because he's about the consistency of a charcoal briquette. There was a message emailed to the Harbor Police tip line from Mr. Ivanovich, confessing to the fire that burned down my house, at the behest of Mr. Dmitri Popov."

"So Ivanovich burned himself to death after Dmitri Popov crashed his car while on the phone with him? That doesn't sound suspicious at all," Jamie said, sarcasm in full effect.

"Oh, it gets better," Mike said. "Dmitri didn't crash into anything. He drove off Harbor Heights pier and they think he was going at least eighty when he hit the end of the pier. The car was quite a distance when it went in, and two witnesses

say they thought it was a movie stunt because the car exploded before it hit the water.”

“Cars don’t spontaneously combust in mid-air,” Jamie said. “So he was murdered. It’s probably a good guess that Ivanovich was also murdered and the whole suicide thing was staged. Most people don’t decide fire is the best way to off themselves.”

“Do you think Drina is in danger?” Mike asked.

“Why don’t you pop in and see if she’s okay?” Jamie asked.

“No, I don’t like going there. I went there once and couldn’t even get inside. There are a lot of angry ghosts in that house. Just call her and check on her?”

Jamie pulled out his phone and looked up Drina’s number, then sent her a text. *“Making sure you’re okay. Heard about your brother. My condolences to you and your family.”*

“There, I sent her a text. If she’s in mourning, the last thing she needs is an intrusive phone call first thing in the morning,” Jamie said.

He felt pretty smug – until his phone rang. “It’s Drina,” Jamie said with a sigh and answered on speaker. “Drina?”

“Oh, Jameson, it’s so horrible. My poor Dmitri is gone,” she wailed into the phone.

“Is there anything I can do to help you and your family at this time?” Jamie asked.

“No, but that you reached out is so sweet. Papa is beside himself. He’s been ill recently and now he won’t leave his room. Little Maxim is trying to be comforting to me, but I worry that he is so young.”

“He’s what, nine? Ten? He’ll be able to understand just fine, Drina. Let him be useful and that will help him more than anything else.”

“How do you know so well what a young boy will think with death?”

"I was eleven when my father was killed. My mother died a month after my high school graduation. I understood just fine what was going on when we buried my Dad. He'll handle it, too."

"I did not know that," Drina said. "About your family. I am sorry. I will do what you suggest and have Maxim help with things. Thank you for reaching out, Jameson."

"Give me a call if you need anything, Drina. Again, my condolences," Jamie said.

"Thank you," Drina replied, then disconnected the call.

"I had forgotten that you lost your family so young. No siblings either, right?" Mike asked.

"I had a little sister, Mary Colleen, but she died of leukemia two years after Dad. I was twelve, MC was ten. Four years later, Mom died of breast cancer. To be honest, Mom had checked out after MC died. It was too much for her. I have aunts and uncles and cousins, but it's not the same, y'know?"

"Yeah, it's not the same."

"I'm gonna go for a run. See you in a bit," Jamie said and went to change into running gear.

Mike was quiet as he watched his friend head out. No one knew better than Michael Donovan how much death was a part of life. He just wished that sometimes he wasn't such a stark reminder of it all.

Chapter Seventeen

Re-living the memories of losing his family drove Jamie to run an extra couple of laps around the park. His legs were trembling by the time he climbed the stairs to his apartment. A bottle of water drained and a second one brought over to the table where Jamie sat for a minute, closed his eyes, and tried to box up the memories once more. It had been long enough that he'd forgotten the sound of MC's laugh. They used to make blanket forts with old quilts and the fold-up card table, then sit under it with flashlights and play games or read books. There was a tire swing in the side yard and she would squeal with laughter every time he pushed her high enough for the tire to spin in lazy circles. They'd named his daughter Colleen in honor of his sister. Eddie was named for Elise's father, but his middle name was James, for Jamie's dad.

He had only a handful of memories of his father. He'd managed a local grocery store and when they broke in after closing to rob the place, James Kennedy was the only one left inside. He often stayed a couple of hours after closing, to do paperwork while the staff cleaned and prepared for the next day. They would all leave and he would finish up in the quiet building. That night, two men broke in and shot James Kennedy, and stole eight thousand dollars. This was before cell phones were a thing and James lay in his office for nearly five hours before he

finally died. Jamie used to think about that often. Five hours of pain – all alone – in the dark. He'd needed the light on at night for a long time after that.

It was why Jamie became a cop – to try and keep someone else's dad from being alone in the dark. He knew better, now, that it didn't really work that way. Even worse, being a homicide detective, you only got called after it was all over. He now saw it as his job to speak for the dead. To get them justice.

Yet, here he was, still not able to solve his own partner's murder. Part of him still thought he might have a brain tumor, or some other neurological damage that explained why he saw his partner's ghost. No, not only saw the ghost of his dead partner, but had regular conversations with him. Now a growing part of him wanted to believe in the mystery and wonder of the universe and accept that yes, it was Michael Donovan's consciousness that he had had these conversations with. That it was Mike who had given him instructions on how to find the hidden closet compartment and how to escape the burning house. How else could one explain everything that had happened since Mike's murder? There really wasn't any other logical explanation.

Jamie finished his water and went to take a shower. The case wasn't over and he needed Joey to talk it out with him. They were missing something.

An hour later, Jamie had two pizzas in one hand, his bag with his laptop in the other as he toe-knocked against Joey's door. Dai answered and took the pizza from him as he stepped inside.

"Thanks for letting me come by," Jamie said. "I need to talk this case out because there's something I'm missing and it's making me nuts."

"Dai and I are happy to eat your pizza in exchange for brainstorming," Joey replied.

Dai laughed and set the pizza on the counter, then pulled out plates while Joey got the beer. "I'm just here for comic relief," Dai said.

"No, Dai. Your input is most welcome. You do similar stuff, just on a larger scale. It's all about missing pieces of the puzzle," Jamie said. "And I'm starting to wonder if what I thought might be two separate puzzles, is actually just one really complex puzzle."

"Puzzles *are* kinda my thing," Dai said. "Just on an international scale. Wait, I have something that might help." He went out into the garage and came back with a tripod, a giant pad of plain paper, and a box of markers. "Let's do it right, shall we?"

"Well, alrighty then," Jamie said with a laugh. "Do we start with Mike's murder?"

"I think we should start with the case that put Tony Carrera behind bars," Joey said.

"Tony Carrera took Sasha Kotov and three or four other people out on his yacht. Sasha's body washed up on Harbor Point beach the next morning. Her roommate, Tanya Sobolev, had to work that night, so she didn't go. Tanya identified Sasha's body and told investigators that she'd been out on her boyfriend's yacht. When Tony's yacht docked at the pier, police picked up everyone on the boat for questioning and had CSI go over the vessel. They found Sasha's blood on Tony's clothes, underneath a railing on the back of the boat, and on bits of broken glass in the trash. The other party-goers had witnessed Sasha and Tony's fight the night before. She had slapped him and he grabbed a bottle of champagne and smashed it against her head. Blood went everywhere and he flipped out and tossed her body over the side. He told them all that if they talked, he'd kill them himself, then ordered his crew to clean up the mess."

"Sounds pretty cut and dried to me," Joey said. "Witnesses, blood evidence, murder weapon – couldn't have been more neatly tied in a bow."

"Tony didn't even go to trial. He took a plea deal that gave him thirty-five years instead of eighty, if he spilled some of the secrets of his father's crime family. He

turned in one of the lower level syndicate members – and that’s where it stopped. They thought they’d get a lot more out of him, but nothing else that he said led to any arrests. He strung them along – until he got the crap beat out of him a week before Mike was killed.”

”He wasn’t talking to anyone after that,” Joey said. “According to the prison hospital, he never woke up from the beating and died from a blood clot. But he died after his father was murdered, and Nicky was the one that took Mike from the grocery store lot.”

”Okay, so we’ve got Tony Carrera as a killer, and his father, Nicky Carrera who was behind the abduction of Donovan from the grocery store parking lot,” Dai said as he made circles on the pad and wrote names in them.

”We still don’t know for sure *who* killed Michael Donovan, but we have evidence that says Nicky Carrera drove the van Mike was shoved into – and no evidence as to who owned or drove a second van, burned on the beach, that was the kill van for Mike’s murder. We can’t say for sure that Carrera was behind Mike’s murder, just his kidnapping,” Joey said. “We also have Saul Mizzotta’s attack on Jamie and me at the furniture store, which means Saul could have been the one that killed Mike *and* killed Nicky, in order to take over the organization.”

”We really need to question Paulie,” Jamie said. “He has some of the answers.”

”You can do that. I’m not a cop anymore, remember?” Joey replied.

”I can get you in there, if you want,” Jamie said. “It might be a good idea for you to actually talk to him and get some closure.”

”And we can hold hands and sing Kumbaya? I don’t think so,” Joey said.

”Right, because getting answers is so beneath you. Sorry I asked,” Jamie said and got to his feet. He put his half-eaten slice of pizza in the trash and his plate in the sink. “Enjoy the pizza. I’m not hungry,” he added as he grabbed his laptop bag and headed to the door.

"Jamie, hold up a sec," Dai said as he followed him to the door. "Look, Joe's in a rough place right now. He's afraid he made a mistake, leaving the force – even though I'm taking a leave of absence from my job to help him get everything set up with the PI gig. He gets headaches all the time now, since the fire, and they're going to do some scans next week to see what's going on. A lot of this? He blames on Paulie and his greed."

"I get it, Dai," Jamie said. His shoulders sagged and he sighed. "I'm questioning everything and wondering if I'll even be able to stay on the job myself. I feel adrift and confused, and I've lost everyone that ever meant anything to me. My best friend is dead, my ex and my kids are several states away, and the second best partner I ever had, quit the force. I don't know, when I get back into the office, if I'll be stuck with a partner who considers me the worst case scenario, or if I'll end up doing the rotation partner gig, where I never have the same one two nights in a row. On top of it all, I have yet to solve my best friend and partner of eight years' murder – and it's been almost two months now. Some detective *I* am if I can't even do that." Jamie shook his head and let out a breath. "Sorry, that was a lot to dump on you. See if you can get Joey to talk to Paulie with me, or without me? I honestly think he's the only one that could get the information out of him that we need to wrap this all up."

"Hang in there, Jamie. I'll see what I can do. Go on home and I'll let you know if I can get him to change his mind," Dai said.

"Appreciate it," Jamie said and closed the door behind himself.

"Well, that was a fucking mess," Mike said as Jamie got into his car.

"Don't you start with me. I'm having a shitty night."

"Go to the Copper and have a couple of drinks, watch the game, be around people," Mike suggested.

"Not until your case is solved. They'll all ask questions and I don't have answers. Saying, 'gee, I dunno' is not going to cut it with these guys."

"So what are you going to do? Go home, drink in front of the TV by yourself, pass out, and do it all over again tomorrow? That's wasting your life, Jamie. Trust me, I know about how fast it can all end," Mike said.

"Great, now my dead partner is going to guilt me for not solving his murder. Fuck off, Mike. I really don't need this shit tonight."

Mike faded from the passenger's seat and Jamie let out a breath as he pulled into a parking spot in front of his building. He really couldn't remember a time he'd felt so low – except for the night Elise asked him to move out because she wanted a divorce. That was almost as shitty as this night. Almost. He'd seen the divorce coming a mile away. He'd also thought he would have had Mike's murder solved a month ago.

Up the stairs, until he stopped outside his door. A gift basket sat in front of his door, and it was so large, it nearly touched the door knob. A card was stuck to the top, so he took a moment and eyed the basket, the memory of a pipe bomb having been left on his doorstep making him more than a little wary. Nothing looked 'off', so he opened the card and read, *"Thank you for caring. Your advice helped so much – Drina"*.

Jamie unlocked the door and pushed it open, then slid the giant basket inside before he locked up behind himself. It took two hands to lift the thing onto the coffee table and he peeled the plastic off to reveal two bottles of good whiskey, a loaf of fancy bread, some hard salami, several types of cheese, grapes, apples, pears, jars of stuffed olives, fancy pickles, a couple of cheese spreads, sweet preserves, a tin with cookies, another with chocolates – he lost track of all of the different treats. He pulled out his phone and sent Drina a text, thanking her for the surprise, then got a plate and a glass in the kitchen, turned on the ballgame, and settled in to enjoy the luxuries. Funny how a shitty night could be improved with some good whiskey, a few olives, and a note of appreciation.

Chapter Eighteen

Four days after Drina sent the basket to Jamie, he found himself standing in the back of the small gathering at the graveside service for her brother Dmitri *and* her father, Alexei. Alexei had died a day and a half after her brother ‘from natural causes’ the autopsy said. Both were cremated and now they were being interred in the same grave beside Alexei’s first wife – Drina and Dmitri’s mother, Katarina. Jamie thought Drina looked strong, standing beside the grave, the hand of her little brother clutched lightly in her own.

Dr. Finney had told Jamie that Alexei had been dying of prostate cancer, but a heart attack took him before the cancer could finish him off. Finney also said the heart attack was likely caused by the advanced syphilis he suffered from, but with so many potential causes of death, it was easier to just pick one and move on.

The investigative team had put out a probable murder on Dmitri, but they couldn’t be definitive based on what was left of the car. The only questionable piece of information came from the witnesses that said the car exploded before it hit the water. They couldn’t say for sure if it exploded as it left the pier, after it was in the air, or before it left the end of the pier. Without any way to tell for

sure, they just left his death as ‘questionable circumstances, likely suicide’ and closed the case.

Seated beside where Drina stood was a thin blond woman who looked much too happy to be at a funeral. Two children at her side, a boy and a girl, looked bored. Jamie surmised that they were Dmitri’s widow and children, and from what he’d heard of their treatment at his hands, he expected them to start dancing on the bastard’s grave before the service was over.

The priest was speaking in Russian now, so Jamie turned to head back to his car. He didn’t want to socialize after the event, but he’d felt compelled to attend to at least show a little support to Drina. Once inside the car, Mike appeared. “Um, Jamie?”

“Yes, Mike?”

“Someone here needs to talk to you,” Mike said. “Is it okay?”

“Let me guess, they’re dead, right?”

“Yeah, they’re dead. It’s Alexei Popov,” Mike said. “He wants to give you a warning.”

“Sure, Mike. Let me drive a bit further into the cemetery, though, so no one sees me talking to myself in my car, okay?” Jamie asked as he started up and drove about a half mile deeper into the grounds. He got out and pulled a thin cigar from his jacket pocket and lit up.

Mike appeared in front of him and then suddenly there were two. Alexei looked younger and healthier than he’d been recently, so it took Jamie a minute to recognize him.

“Mr. Popov,” Jamie said with a polite nod of his head.

“Mr. Kennedy. Michael here says you are the only one that can see him, so that makes you pretty special. I can see you have a good heart, so I wished to warn you. My daughter, Alexandrina, is not a good person. She had Dmitri murdered, as well as Peter Ivanovich – and then she helped my own lingering death along.

Potassium chloride injected into my IV line gave me an instantaneous heart attack. While I consider it a blessing, she meant it to be a merciful end that would finally give her control over my empire. I love my daughter, and I admire her strength and intelligence – but I do not wish her to raise Maxim to be as she is. My little boy is an artist, not a ruthless killer like his sister.”

“And what would you have me do, Mr. Popov? Because your word, from the grave – as it were – is not going to work for probable cause for a warrant or investigation. Also, potassium chloride is a usual byproduct of a heart attack, so having it in your system is not proof – and you were cremated, so there’s no further testing to be done. To be blunt, sir, she’s going to get away with it,” Jamie said.

“Talk to Tanya Sobolev,” Alexei said. “She’s my late sister’s child – Drina’s first cousin.”

Jamie knew that name sounded familiar, but it took him a minute to put it together. “Wait, wasn’t she Sasha Kotov’s roommate?”

Alexei nodded. “Drina didn’t give Michael Donovan that watch only because he was kind to her dog. It was because you and he put away the killer of someone she cared about. Sasha, Tanya, and Drina all went to boarding school together. They were like sisters. Sasha’s death – it changed something in my little Alexandrina. Not for the better.”

“I’ll see what I can do, Mr. Popov,” Jamie said.

“It is my time to go. I fear I will not be in a happy place. Good luck, gentlemen,” Alexei said as he faded away.

“How the hell did we ever solve a case before we could talk to the dead after the fact?” Jamie mused as he smoked his cigar.

“We didn’t solve all of them,” Mike said. “I’m sorry I pushed, Jamie.”

“And I’m sorry I snapped, Mike,” Jamie said. “I’m just really struggling here and I don’t see a clear path forward. I wish I could tell Dai and Joey about you

and how I get some of this information, but I can't – and it is exhausting trying to remember what I can and cannot say.”

“I hear you, my friend. Best head on home before Drina comes to find you.”

“Good point,” Jamie said and put out his cigar, then got back into the car. “Come talk to me tonight? Maybe we can plot things out like we started to do at Joey's.”

“I'll be there,” Mike said.



Jamie had a stack of files he'd picked up at the office piled on one side of his laptop, a half-eaten sub sandwich on the other side, and a soft drink in his hand. He was staring at the screen, but not really reading it. Andras Baros, his banking connection, had emailed him back with instructions on how to cash in the bearer bonds. Jamie had printed out the forms and put the packet together, then had a courier deliver it to the bank two days ago. He had put half of the money into an account for Elise, a portion of the other half had been sent to Patrick Donovan, Mike's father, and the rest was in Jamie's account. He'd paid the taxes on his portion already, and put most of what was left into an investment account – but he was still staring at a bank balance that was larger than anything he'd ever imagined would be in his name. Jamie decided then and there that tomorrow would be a serious house-hunting day. He'd make a list, contact a realtor friend, and go look at properties tomorrow. No longer would he be putting his money into someone else's pocket. It was time he had his own place once more.

“You should find a place closer to the water,” Mike said from behind him.

Jamie just closed his eyes, let out a breath, then said, “So help me, Michael Francis Donovan, if I could figure out a way to bell you, like a cat, I most certainly would.”

Mike laughed and perched on the edge of the table. “Sorry, not sorry,” he said and pointed at the screen. “You should take a look at the new places going up on Seaside Court. They’ve got two bedrooms with en suite baths upstairs, divided by a loft sitting area. Downstairs is a big living-dining-kitchen area with an office and another bedroom and bath. It’s not too big, and there’s a front porch, small back yard, and a balcony off the second floor that both bedrooms open onto. Imagine sitting on the balcony, having your coffee, watching the boats in the harbor.”

“What have you been doing? House hunting for me?” Jamie asked.

“Sort of, yeah. I don’t sleep, so I got bored and decided to wander around town.”

“Those do sound kinda perfect,” Jamie said as he pulled up the site for the new project on his laptop. “A little pricey, though.”

“Says the guy who is now a millionaire?” Mike chided. “You could buy it outright and have no mortgage to worry about – and still have plenty to keep in investments and be comfortable.”

Jamie hesitated and Mike leaned over. “Just do it. Life’s too short. I’m a perfect example of that. Besides, you could set up one of those upstairs bedrooms as a guest suite and leave a TV on low all the time so I can watch when you’re not around. Call it my hangout spot.”

“I was curious about something,” Jamie said. “Can electronic devices ‘hear’ you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I could get a bunch of those smart outlets and plug a TV and one of those hub devices into it so you could ask Jeeves to turn the TV off and on and change the channels, listen to music, or leave me text messages on my phone. Stuff like that.”

“I have no idea. Put your phone on record and let’s try it out?” Mike said.

Jamie could sense Mike's excitement as he set the phone to record and put it on the table next to Mike. "Go ahead, say something."

"I really hope this works," Mike said. "It would mean a level of independence in the living world that I've been missing."

Jamie tapped the phone to stop the recording, then hit play. They both heard Jamie's voice, then clearly heard Mike's voice, but it sounded distant, as if he were in the next room.

"I think that just might work," Jamie said with a grin. "I'll grab the stuff to set it up and we can give it a shot."

Mike seemed to almost vibrate with excitement. "This opens up so many possibilities. I can leave recordings and other people can hear me. I can talk to my kids, I can..."

"Mike, no. Stop," Jamie said. "You can't talk to your kids. Imagine what that would do to them?"

Mike slumped. "You're right. I'm sorry. I just got so excited. Maybe we can figure out a way for me to leave a recording for each one, and you can tell them I did them before I died?"

"That I can help you with, sure. Record them, then put the files on the computer and tell them I found them when I was packing up the house. Think about what you want to say to them and we'll do that sometime down the road, okay?"

"Okay," Mike said. "I appreciate your help. I just miss them so much and don't want them to feel like their father never cared."

"They know you cared, Mike. The pictures I found showed more images of you with them, doing things, than Katie. She may have been the day to day person, but the memories? Those will come from when you helped Kevin build that model plane or when you taught Maureen how to ice skate."

"I hope you're right," Mike said. "Hey, did you reach out to Tanya whatshername? The one Alexei Popov said to talk to?"

“Not yet. I figure she’s probably at the funeral and with Drina, so I’d rather wait until tomorrow when I’ve got a better chance of reaching her without Drina around.”

“Ah, good point. Have you reached out to Joey again?”

“No. To be frank, I’m hoping he’ll reach out to me, first. I’m not so keen on reaching out and getting my hand slapped again. If I don’t hear from him by the end of the week, I’ll give him a call and make sure he’s healing okay.”

“Who knows? Maybe by then you’ll be able to tell him about your upcoming new address,” Mike said.

“Yeah, who knows?” Jamie replied.

Chapter Nineteen

Sarge called Jamie on Wednesday and asked him to come in the next morning. As requested, nine in the morning on Thursday, seated across the desk from his sergeant, Jamie sat in jeans, a jacket, shirt, and tie, and sipped his coffee while Sarge looked for a file on his desk.

“Her name is Jacquelyn Forbes, she goes by Jack, and she just moved to Harbor from New York City. Apparently she has family in the area and wanted a change,” Sarge said. “Been a detective for five years, so you’re not getting a raw rookie – and she knows the area a bit, but obviously not as well as you do. She has several commendations and we’re honestly pretty lucky to get her. Ah, here it is,” he said as he pulled out a file folder and handed it over to Jamie.

Jamie put his coffee down on the edge of the desk and flipped through the file. The photo showed short dark hair, wide green eyes, and tanned skin. Her record spoke of a practical, driven person who could handle herself in a wide range of situations.

“Is she coming in today?” Jamie asked.

“She’s supposed to be here in about ten minutes. I gave her the case files you’ve updated, so she’s got the basics, but you’ll need to fill her in on the practical points. I hear you might have an angle you’re working?”

“Yeah, I keep going back to Tony Carrera’s case. That seems to be where this all started. Sasha Kotov had a roommate, Tanya Sobolev. Turns out, Tanya is first cousins with Alexandrina Popov. With the recent deaths in that family, Drina Popov is now the new Priest – or Priestess – running the organization. I want to know what Tanya knows about Sasha and about Drina.”

“Sounds like a good angle. I also hear you just bought a house?”

“Yeah, they’re finishing the details, so I’ll be moving sometime in the next couple of weeks. I’ll be honest, I’m looking forward to having a backyard again.”

“I miss Donovan’s barbecues at his place. Maybe you’ll hold one and invite your poor old Sarge to check out your new digs?”

Jamie chuckled. “I’ll invite you over for beer and burgers when the Sox are in the playoffs.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Sarge said. A tap on his door and he called out, “Come in.”

Jamie got to his feet as Jack Forbes entered the office. “Hi, I’m Jamie Kennedy,” he said and held out his hand.

A firm shake was offered in return. “Jack Forbes. Pleased to finally meet you.” Her voice was pitched a little lower than some, and her height put the top of her head about level with Jamie’s nose. A pair of black slacks, a blue silk tank top and a short black jacket looked both professional and easy to move in. On her feet were short heeled black ankle boots with what looked like rugged soles.

They both took seats in front of Sarge’s desk as he smiled at them both. “My plan is to have you two partner up for two weeks and then you can each let me know if you want to continue, or change it up. No harm, no foul, if you decide the partnership doesn’t fit.”

“Isn’t that a little unusual?” Jack asked.

“It is, but as I explained, this is an unusual situation. Jamie has been one of my top detectives for seven of his eight years on the squad. With Donovan’s murder, then Mahoney’s resignation, I want to make sure he’s comfortable enough to keep going. I also want to make sure you are comfortable, Jack. You come highly recommended, and your file makes me want to help you fit in here,” Sarge said.

“What Sarge means is, he’s scared I’m going to go join Joey Mahoney’s PI firm and leave him swinging in the wind,” Jamie said with a tease in his voice. “I’m just hoping he remembers that I didn’t jump at the higher salary, when review time comes around.”

Sarge chuckled and shook his head. “I should also warn you, Kennedy is a smart ass.”

“That’s fine,” Jack said. “I’ve been told I’m a smart ass too.”

“Okay, you two. Get out of my office and get to work. Jack’s already had her orientation and is all set up in your office, so let’s see if you can get some work done today?” Sarge said.

They both got up and Jamie grabbed his coffee. “Yes, sir,” they both said and left the office.

“Please tell me you know where there’s better coffee than the break room?” Jack asked as she spied his cup.

“Come, let me introduce you to my magic bean juice machine,” Jamie replied and pulled out his keys to open the office, then shut the door behind them. He unlocked his cabinet and withdrew the pod coffee maker, set it on top of his cabinet and plugged it in. “I have my own supply of pods, but if you want to bring in whatever you prefer, that’s fine too.” He put the box of pods next to the pot and filled the reservoir with water, then turned it on. “Should be ready in a minute or two.”

“Fantastic,” Jack said. “I’ve got pods in a box at my place...somewhere. I’ll dig them out tonight.”

“Still unpacking?” Jamie asked.

“Yeah, I was in one of those home suite hotels until two days ago.”

“Sarge said you had family in the area?”

“I do. My son is attending college in Harbor. He lives on campus. He’s studying technical engineering as a freshman.”

“That’s fantastic. My kids are in Florida, with my ex wife. It’s safer for them down there. I miss them, but with everything that went on over the past couple of months, I’d rather they were somewhere they can be kids and not worry about what I’m doing – or not doing – on the job.”

“Avery had a bedroom in my apartment, and in his father’s apartment – and I lived upstairs from my ex. It worked out great for Avery, since he had us both and if I got stuck working late, he was never without someone to keep an eye on him.” Jack picked up the mug from her desk and handed it to Jamie, since he still stood in front of the coffee machine.

He put a pod in, pushed the lever down, and watched as the cup filled. He handed it back to Jack and tossed the used pod. “There’s powdered creamer in the drawer where the machine lives, and sugar packets, but I usually drink it black in here, or with creamer if I’ve had too many cups.”

“Black is fine,” Jack said as she took a sip, then moved to sit at her desk. “I didn’t move to Harbor because I couldn’t handle my son being away from me – it just seemed like a good choice when I needed to get out of New York. This way, we can still do holidays or weekends now and then – and neither one of us has to deal with going solo in a strange place.”

“Do you mind me asking why you had to leave the city?”

“I don’t mind you asking, but for now, I’m going to give you a less than detailed reply. I had a case that went bad. I got shot and almost died. I couldn’t trust some

of the cops in my squad to have my back – so I left.”

“Sounds a bit like what went down here,” Jamie said. “Joey Mahoney is a fantastic detective – but his partner, Paul Giannetti, was dirty – and good at hiding it. Joey got caught up in the backlash against Paulie and decided to take early retirement instead of risking his life – and mine.”

“I heard Sarge say that Mahoney asked for clearance to go visit Giannetti at the prison. Has he been to see him at all since everything blew up?”

“He did? Good,” Jamie said. “He and I got into an argument last week when I told him he needed to go talk to Paulie and get some answers. He wasn’t going to do it. I’m betting Joey’s boyfriend talked him into it.”

“I’ve also heard that Giannetti was behind your partner, Donovan’s, murder?”

“I don’t think Paulie had anything to do with Mike’s death – but I think he was tangled up in the people that were responsible. We know Nicky Carrera was the driver of the van Mike was shoved into at the grocery store. We know Paulie was working for Saul Mizzotta, Nicky’s right hand man, because he was in some serious gambling debt. That’s about as close of a connection we can find. There’s also the fact that Donovan’s wife, Katie, was cheating with Paulie. I honestly believe that Katie didn’t have anything to do with Mike’s death. She was about to serve him with divorce papers, and if she went to all of the trouble and expense to start a divorce, why would she turn around and risk it all to murder him? She’s not a stupid person.”

“So what *do* you think happened?” Jack asked.

“As pathetic as it sounds, I think Mike’s death was an accident. I think Nicky grabbed him with the intent of giving him a beating and dumping him somewhere as a punishment for arresting Nicky’s son, Tony. Tony got beat up at the prison and was in the hospital ward when Mike was grabbed. When he died during the beating, they panicked. That’s why there’s about four hours between when he died, and when his body was found. My guess is that Nicky called Saul

to dispose of the body, and that's where the van swap happened. Then Nicky tried to get Saul and his goon squad to take me out. They weren't very invested, because Saul took off with one of the guys I shot and the rest got arrested. Saul then had leverage over Nicky for killing a cop, and he used that to kill Nicky on Katie's front lawn but tried to make it look like a cartel-style killing. Paulie freaked out and went to confront Saul – but his car died and he got picked up before he could even get to him. Katie moved out of the house into Paulie's place, probably out of some mistaken idea it would further cement their relationship while he was in prison. She was already mentally unstable and when the neighbor woman joked about stealing Paulie back, Katie stabbed her to death. Now she's in prison as well."

"Good gods, didn't she have kids with Donovan?" Jack asked.

"Yeah, two kids – Colleen and Kevin. My wife took the kids to her place, and the day after the funeral, she flew all four kids down to Florida and rented a house down there. Within a couple of weeks, Katie had signed over her parental rights to Elise and moved into Paulie's place. She didn't want to be a mother anymore. Luckily, Elise and I have been a part of those kids' lives since they were small, and now their paternal grandfather lives in the house next door and they're doing really well, considering."

"Then answer me this – why is Donovan's murder still unsolved?"

"I don't have definitive proof of his death being an accident. I need to hear from Paulie, or from Saul, about what actually happened. Saul is on the run, and Paulie isn't talking. That's why I needed Joey to go talk to him. If Paulie's going to spill to anyone, it's Joey. He's a narcissist and he will *need* to tell Joey every juicy detail and lord it over him. Even more so now that Joey is no longer on the force."

"Sounds like what you need is a manhunt for Saul Mizzotta," Jack said.

“On what grounds? Accessory after the fact? We don’t know *who* killed Mike Donovan, and the one person that could tell us for sure, Nicky Carrera, is dead. Paulie has refused to talk to anyone, even his lawyer, about the murder. That makes me believe he knows who did it and is keeping himself alive by not saying anything. Does that mean I believe Saul did it? No. Saul isn’t the kind of guy that goes after cops, when there are other ways to get them to leave you alone.”

“Then what’s with the Russian chick? What’s her name?” Jack asked.

“Which one? I told Sarge this morning that I think this whole thing starts with a case Mike and I worked last year. Tony Carrera killed his girlfriend, Sasha Kotov – and that’s what got him put in prison. Sasha’s roommate was Tanya Sobolev. Tanya is first cousins with Alexandrina Popov.”

“And Ms. Popov’s brother and father were both buried last weekend, right?”

“Right. And now she’s the new head of the organization. I want to talk to Tanya about Sasha and Drina – and find out what she knows about anything we’ve been dealing with.”

“I’d like to come with you for that conversation,” Jack said.

“I thought you’d never ask,” Jamie replied.

Chapter Twenty

Jamie and Jack pulled up in front of a Craftsman-style bungalow a couple of blocks in from a tiny beach area in South Harbor. Pale yellow shingles and crisp white trim gave it a sunny, well-kept appearance, and the small front porch held two wicker chairs with yellow stripe cushions and a bright red geranium in a pot on the table between them.

"This is really cute," Jack said as she stepped up to the door. "I wouldn't mind a place like this for myself."

"There's one very similar, but not in as good shape, about half a mile up the street," Jamie said. "I looked at it before I picked the place I just bought. You should check it out."

"I think I will," Jack said as she gave the door a couple of solid raps. The screen door was white-painted wood and fit the look of the place better than a metal storm door might.

The inside door opened and a tall brunette stood in the doorway. "Yes? May I help you?"

"Are you Tanya Sobolev?" Jack asked. "We're detectives with the Harbor police and we'd like to ask you a few questions."

"I am she," Tanya said and stepped back. "Come inside."

They entered the foyer of the house and followed Tanya through the living room, and what might have been a dining room, but was set up as a home office, into the kitchen at the back of the house. "I just made coffee, would you like some?"

"That'd be great," Jack said. Tanya gestured to the table and they both sat down. "Black for me," Jamie said as he put one of his cards on the table where Tanya would sit. "I'm Jameson Kennedy, and this is Jacquelyn Forbes."

Tanya turned when she heard Jamie's name and gave him a smile. "You are one of the men who arrested the killer of my dear Sasha."

"Yes, I am. That's part of what I wanted to talk to you about. What can you tell me about Sasha and your cousin, Alexandrina Popov? I heard the three of you were like sisters," Jamie said, his tone gentle.

"Is Drina in trouble?" Tanya asked.

"No, but I've helped her a few times recently, and I wanted to know more about her, so I might continue to help her in the best way possible."

"She's been through so much lately," Jack said.

"Oh, she has," Tanya replied. "But she's orchestrated nearly all of it." She put the mugs and the carafe of coffee on the table, then put cream and sugar out as well. A plate of homemade chocolate chip cookies was added to the table before she sat down. "I made these last night. I could not sleep. Please, help me eat them so I do not get fat."

Jack chuckled. "You look like you could eat all of these yourself and not get fat, but I'm happy to have chocolate and sugar at any time. Thank you."

"Are you not worried that Drina might come after you if you speak to us?" Jamie asked.

It was Tanya's turn to laugh. "No, Drina would not dare. My Papa is still very much alive, back in Moscow. He is Grandmama Irina's favorite now that Uncle Alexei is gone. When it all comes together, the one that truly holds the power in our family is Grandmama Irina Solovyova. She's had four husbands who have

all died from strange circumstances. Grandpapa Popov was her second husband. Grandpapa Sobolev was her third. She had children with each of the first three husbands, but not the fourth. She has many many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but she is involved in every single one of their lives, no matter what country they live in. I had to fly to Moscow and have an audience with her before she let me continue on to grad school instead of finding a husband. I'm about to finish my doctoral degree in Russian literature, so I may teach at the colleges while I do my best to be an author."

"That sounds...complicated," Jack said.

Tanya gave a shrug and broke a cookie in half, nibbling on a piece. She washed the cookie down with coffee before she spoke. "It is what we are used to. Complicated is what Drina is making her own life. She must be a mother to Maxim now, and she is not a very maternal type of person. I hope she keeps his nanny, Malina, in his life. Malina has been mother to him since he was three."

"What did Drina do after Sasha was murdered?" Jamie asked.

"She found out all she could about you and your other partner, Donovan. She orchestrated the accident when you would be nearby, so she could meet you both. I know she connected with Michael Donovan, but not so much with you."

"I'm not the one that was gifted a twenty-six thousand dollar watch," Jamie told her.

"But you have it now, yes? Drina said she was happy someone was wearing it that was worthy of the gift," Tanya said.

"I have it now, yes. Mike's wife didn't want anything to do with it so she gave it to me. I still don't feel comfortable wearing it unless it's for a formal event. I'm not very gentle on my watches," Jamie said.

"It is just a watch," Tanya replied. "You should be careful, though. Drina thinks you are a very good man. If you do something she doesn't think fits that viewpoint she has of you? She will punish you."

Jack's brows went up as she looked at Jamie and he gave her a shrug. "I'm sorry to say, Tanya, that I don't live my life worried about what Ms. Popov might, or might not think of me. I'm a man, like any other. I have my flaws and faults."

"What else did Drina do, other than find out what she could about Donovan and Kennedy?" Jack asked.

"She learned about your families, your friends – she knew Katherine Donovan was sleeping with Paul Giannetti months before Michael was killed. They are both very lucky they are in prison now. It is not the ideal punishment in Drina's eyes, but it is sufficient. She won't kill Katherine, simply because Donovan's children have lost enough. Giannetti, however, is different."

"Paulie's been in solitary and on strict watch since he went in," Jamie said.

"But that won't be forever," Tanya replied. "Once his trial is over, and he is moved to the penitentiary, he won't be so carefully observed. Drina plays the long game, always."

"What about Saul Mizzotta?" Jamie asked.

"He has been dealt with," Tanya replied.

"He's dead?" Jack asked.

"Yes, but his body won't be found. Any remaining business holdings of what was once the Carrera family organization, now belong to a subsidiary of the Popov holdings. I believe you've heard of Semeyny Corporate Services?"

"Woah," Jamie said softly. "Let me ask you this, Tanya. If I go to Drina and ask her who killed Michael Donovan – would she answer me?"

"I believe she would. I think only you could ask her that and not be punished for the question. She knows you are driven to find his killer, and so was she."

Jamie knew he would get answers if he asked the right questions, so he took a sip of his coffee and ate a cookie while he considered what he needed to know.

"Why are you giving us all of this information?" Jack asked.

"Because Drina said if you ever came to speak to me, I was to answer whatever questions you asked. I am not involved in anything, beyond being family to the one that has orchestrated everything, so I am not at risk. Knowing something and not saying anything until you are asked – is not a crime. It is self-preservation in most cases."

"Do you know who killed Michael Donovan?" Jack asked.

Tanya turned to Jamie when she spoke. "Nicky Carrera's three men beat Michael and one hit him in the temple and it killed him. Drina sent you an email, telling you this. Saul worried about them killing a cop, and he reached out to The Priest. Since Uncle Alexei was so very ill, Drina was handling everything. She was angry that her precious Michael was dead, so she had Saul kill Nicky and tried to frame Paulie and Katie by doing it on her lawn. That email was the truth."

Jamie shook his head. "I thought it was an attempt at drama, a partial fabrication, not the actual truth. I hope Joey can get Paulie to talk, or all we have is hearsay."

"Or you could ask Drina to write it out for you," Tanya said.

"Wouldn't that be a confession to accessory to murder, though?" Jack asked. "If she says she had Saul kill Nicky on the Donovan's lawn to frame Paul and Katie?"

"Ah, Drina would not say that. They reached out to The Priest, not to Alexandrina," Tanya said.

"I think I need to call Drina and see if she'll come down to the station and have a chat," Jamie said. "Thank you for speaking with us so candidly, Tanya. Please give either one of us a call if you think of anything else?"

"Of course. Thank you for coming to see me at last," Tanya said.

They left the house and got into Jamie's car. As he pulled away, he shook his head. "That was the most bizarre thing ever."

"Kinda makes you wish you'd looked her up a month ago?" Jack asked with a smirk.

"I don't know if she would've spoken so freely a month ago. Alexei and Dmitri were still alive then."

"True. So, when are you going to call Drina Popov?"

"Depends on how silent you can be?" Jamie asked.

Jack mimed zipping her lips shut and grinned as she leaned back in the seat. Jamie hit the button on the steering wheel and said "Dial Drina Popov."

"Dialing Drina Popov." the voice said and they heard two rings before the call connected.

"Jameson, good afternoon. What can I do for you, today?" Drina said.

"Hello, Drina. I was wondering if you could come down to the station and speak with me and my new partner for a few minutes? I know you're probably busy, but it would help us wrap up Mike's murder case."

"For you, and for our dear Michael, I can do this. Would about two hours from now be good?"

"That would be excellent, thank you. I look forward to seeing you again."

"And I look forward to seeing you, too, Jameson. I'll bring us coffee."

"That would be lovely, thank you. See you then." Jamie disconnected the call and gave Jack a sideways look. "How about we go get lunch and plan how we're going to handle The Priestess?"

"Sounds like you're paying?" Jack asked and they both laughed.

Chapter Twenty-One

After lunch, Jack and Jamie went back to the station, and set up a small table in their office, with a hidden camera and microphone to record their meeting with Drina. They wanted her to feel comfortable, and an interrogation room wasn't going to do it. A box of pastries from The Baker's Dozen and a stack of napkins made it seem like a casual picnic.

While they were getting the stage set, Sarge made sure Paulie was given extra security and was only allowed Joey or his lawyer as visitors.

Ninety percent of an interrogation is a psychological dance. Knowing this, Jack took off her suit jacket, put her gun in her desk and her shoulder holster hung on the hook under her jacket. The sleeveless silk top was feminine enough to disarm Drina and seemed more casual. Clothing and cosmetics acted as her armor in a woman's world, and Drina Popov would know this. Whether she actually understood it as such or not was a different story.

"All set in here?" Jamie asked as he came back with a short stack of small paper plates. "I think these were left over from someone's birthday. Might be nicer than just handing her a napkin."

Jack grinned as she saw the blue, pink, and yellow balloons around the edge of the plates. "That'll work. Cheery and with memories of celebrations or happier

times.”

”You really get the whole psych aspect of this, don’t you? That’s fantastic. Joey never quite picked up on that angle, but Mike always did,” Jamie said.

”Well, you got your undergrad degree in business, and your grad degree in criminal justice, right? I got my undergrad in psychology, with a concentration in behavioral science, and my grad degree in criminal justice with a concentration in terrorism studies. I had wanted to be a profiler at one point in time, but that’s not the case any longer. However, I have a lot of knowledge about how to screw with someone’s mind in order to get them to tell me what they know – so I’m going to use it.”

”That works for me,” Jamie said. “Use what you’ve got, fake the rest. At least, that’s what I’ve been doing.”

They both chuckled, then fell silent when they heard the knock on the door.

”Show time,” Jack said and sat at her desk.

The blinds were down for privacy, and Jamie opened the door to see the desk clerk standing with Drina Popov. “You sure this is where you’re meeting?” the clerk asked.

”Yes. Ms. Popov is here as a friend. Thank you, Peckham, for bringing her in,” Jamie said as he stepped aside to let Drina enter.

She carried a container with three coffees, a small paper bag balanced on the side, which she handed to Jamie. “Coffee, as I promised.”

Jamie shut the door behind Drina, then set the coffees down on the table.

“Alexandrina Popov, this is my new partner, Jacquelyn Forbes.”

Jack reached out to shake Drina’s hand. “Call me Jack. Nice to meet you.”

”Call me Drina.”

”I picked up some pastries from the bakery,” Jack said. “I thought it’d be nice with the coffee.”

"Oh, I love their pastries," Drina said as she sat between Jack and Jamie at the table, then handed out the coffee. "This is sugar and creamer. I didn't know if perhaps..."

"Relax, Drina. We're just here to talk, okay?" Jamie said with a smile. "I wanted you to meet Jack, as well as update you on Mike's case. You've been so kind and generous, it only seemed right."

"Any woman lucky enough to have you for a partner, Jameson, must be special. I am a little jealous, I think?" Drina said with a smile. "You seem too innocent, too familiar to be a detective. I like you already."

"Thank you. Here, Jamie even found celebratory plates for our pastries," Jack said with a laugh. She handed Drina a plate and slid the box over to her. "You pick first."

They took a couple of moments to fix their coffee and select a pastry. Jack took a big bite of a chocolate éclair and sighed with contentment. She chewed and swallowed, then dabbed at her mouth with a napkin. "So damned good."

Drina had selected a cherry turnover and she closed her eyes as the delicate pastry and sweet filling hit her tongue. "It's art, in your mouth."

"It really is," Jamie said as he bit into the bear claw he had chosen.

"So, Drina, how are you handling being in charge of Maxim? Is he doing okay, considering?" Jamie asked.

"He is doing well. He will be going away to boarding school next month. It is just outside of Paris, France, and he will get to study art, as our Papa wished."

"What about Malina?" Jamie asked.

"She will be let go, with a generous stipend. I hear she plans on moving to Paris, so she can spend holidays with Maxim. That is not my concern, but it is good for him, I suppose."

"That is good, that he gets to keep some consistency in his relationships," Jack said. "It's important for a child's development that they have some stability."

"Precisely why Michael's wife is still alive. Considering what she was doing? She should have been eliminated, but I could not orphan his children," Drina said. "That Doylan woman may have removed herself as their parent, but blood is blood and someday they may want to speak to her about everything."

Jamie looked up and spotted Mike behind Jack. His eyes widened slightly, but he looked back at Drina and Jack as they spoke.

"Doylan? Don't you mean Donovan?" Jack asked.

"No, Katherine Doylan was her maiden name. She has lost the right to call herself Michael's wife. She should have stayed with Dmitri – their personalities were better suited. Michael should have had a kinder, more devoted woman as his wife. Then again, Dmitri was behind it all. Katherine complained to him about how miserable she was, and he took it upon himself to have Tony Carrera attacked and fed the information to Nicky that you and Donovan were behind it," she said the last to Jamie. "Dmitri had put the hit out on you, but when Saul failed, he stepped back. I decided to move things up after that."

Mike listened in silence as it was all laid out for them. This connection was the part they had missed all along.

"How long have you known Katie?" Jamie asked.

"Since we were in middle school years. She's two years older than I am, but we all attended the same private schools. It doesn't matter now. I made sure of that," Drina said with a smug smile.

"Because she was cheating on Mike with Paulie?" Jamie said.

"Partially that, but also because she gave away his children once he was dead and ran off with that idiot, Giannetti. She had a strong, good man and gave him up for a weak, pathetic loser. She always was a little less intelligent than most."

"Not only was she cheating on Mike, but she set it up with Nicky so he'd know where to find Mike, didn't she?" Jack said. She had no idea if that was the truth, but she was going to throw it out there.

"Exactly," Drina said. "How could she not think this was a bad idea? Carrera's crew were idiots and their killing Michael was just another example of their stupidity. They panicked and Saul called Papa, but Papa was barely conscious, so I took care of it. I told Saul to make it look like someone else did it, and he framed the cartels with the murder. Giannetti freaked out and ran to Saul, but got picked up instead. Katherine would've been fine if she hadn't snapped and killed that Stafford woman. Doylan was always a little unstable and prone to drama. Guess she'll get to live with that as long as the prison gangs let her, hmm?"

"What about Paulie?" Jamie asked, afraid to break the thread of the discussion. He couldn't believe Drina was just spilling this all to them. He flicked his gaze towards Mike and saw him give a nod and a sad little smile.

"What about him?" Drina asked as she took another bite of pastry. "Your friend Joey got to speak with him and he seemed to get the resolution he wanted. Giannetti's statement has been recorded that he hid everything he was doing from Mahoney. Not that it matters, really, because most of the detectives in this precinct think with their dicks, not their brains." She looked over at Jamie, then Jack. "Present company excluded, of course."

"So, you're saying that there's a hit out on Katie, and on Paulie?" Jack asked.

"No, not so much. Just that if the opportunity presents itself, take care of the situation," Drina said with a shrug. "Consider it a tax break for the community. Neither one of them is ever getting released. Why should we pay for them to eat and sleep?"

"Good point," Jamie said with a nod. "And Dmitri – that was a community service, too, was it not?"

"Oh, most definitely. One phone call and that irritation was removed. I took care of Papa myself, though. He suffered so much, it was a kindness."

Jack got to her feet and moved behind Drina, the soft metal chime of her cuffs coming out caused Drina to whirl around.

"What is this?" Drina asked.

"Alexandrina Popov, you are under arrest for the murder of Alexei Popov, Dmitri Popov, Saul Mizzotta, and the arranged murder of Dominick Carrera. You have the right to remain silent," Jamie said as he got to his feet and recited her Miranda rights. "Do you understand your rights?"

"Do you understand what you are doing? I can have you both eliminated," Drina yelled as her wrists were cuffed behind her back. "It's my word against yours. You have no proof."

"You've got her now," Mike mouthed to Jamie with a thumbs up, before he faded from view.

Jamie silently pointed to the top of the cabinet where the red blinking light of the recording device could be seen. Drina screamed and stomped her feet as Jamie wrapped a hand around her upper arm.

"I suggest you calm yourself, Drina. Your reputation as a cold-blooded killer is on the line," Jack said as she moved to open the door.

Two uniformed officers stood outside and Jamie handed her over to them. "I didn't search her yet, and here's her purse. Get a female officer to take care of that sooner rather than later, will ya? I don't trust her to not have something up her sleeve. Literally."

"Yes, sir," one of the officers said as they led Drina away.

As the other detectives came out of their offices to see what the yelling was about, and they saw Drina being led away – they broke into applause.

Jamie wasn't having any of it, not after how they treated Joey. He headed towards Sarge's office and knocked on the door.

"Come in," Sarge said.

"Drina Popov is under arrest. We have her confession on the recording. I need to go talk to Joey."

"Jack okay with handling the recording and paperwork?" Sarge asked.

"Yes, Jack is okay with that," Jack said from behind Jamie. "Go ahead, partner. Go talk to him. Let him know it's done."

"Appreciate it," Jamie said to Jack, then looked back at Sarge.

"Yes, go. See you tomorrow," Sarge said.

Jamie went to grab his stuff, wrapped up a couple of pastries, and left. A few minutes later, he was knocking on Joey's door.

Dai answered and gave a faint smile. "Nice to see you. Come in?"

"I've got some news," Jamie said. "And pastries." He handed the package to Dai and stepped inside.

"If that's Kennedy selling something, I'm not buying," Joey called out from the library.

"Fuck you, Mahoney. I've got news, among other things," Jamie yelled back.

"Whatever. Come say your piece," Joey grumbled.

Jamie stepped into the library and leaned against the door frame. "So, Drina Popov confessed to the murders of her brother, her father, and Saul Mizzotta, and the arranged murder of Nicky Carrera. She's being booked right now. Seems Mike's murder was unintentional, and Saul panicked and called The Priest. Drina was managing the organization and had a thing for Mikey, and it just got messy from there. She's also put out an unofficial hit on Katie and Paulie."

"Paulie gave a statement that I had no knowledge of anything he was up to, but I'm still not going back. He really fucked his life up."

"I heard. And I don't blame you," Jamie said. "I would like to invest in your business, though. Mike left me some money. Are you interested?"

"I'll think about it," Joey said.

"Oh, quit being a turdhead," Dai said to Joey as he came in with bottles of water. He handed one to Jamie and then put another beside Joey. "You know you need more capital to do what you want with the business, so take it and be gracious."

Your cranky-ass attitude to someone who is your friend has to stop. Jamie didn't do anything to deserve your bullshit. He's just convenient."

"Eh, it's fine," Jamie said after he took a swallow of water. "I don't blame him for being cranky. I just don't have many friends and I really don't want to lose one because he's having a bad month or three."

"It's only been a few weeks. Maybe a month," Joey replied. "Not months, plural."

"It's six weeks," Dai said.

"Okay, okay. Jeeze, I can't handle the both of you up my ass," Joey complained.

"Not my job. His? Maybe. Not mine," Jamie teased and Dai burst out laughing while Joey just shook his head.

"So how's the new partner?" Joey asked.

"She's no Michael Donovan, or Joey Mahoney, but she's damned good. Jack Forbes is her name and she's sharp, funny, and so far seems to have great instincts," Jamie said.

"Don't fall for her," Joey said.

"I don't think she's into men. I saw her watching people when we went to lunch, and every hottie that turned her head was female. Besides, I'm not shopping for a new partner. I still love Elise."

"I heard you bought a new place," Dai said. "You moved in yet?"

"Not until next weekend, I hope. If everything is finished by then," Jamie said.

"I'll bring the steaks for the grill when you have your 'break in the new place' party," Dai said.

"They call it a housewarming," Joey told him.

"Whatever it's called. I'll bring steaks. Make sure you have a good grill," Dai said with a grin. "I haven't grilled out in a while."

"You do realize I have a grill on the patio out back, right?" Joey said.

"Okay, so I can grill here, too? Fantastic," Dai said.

"Alrighty, I'll leave you two for now. Let me know about the investment, Joe. I'm serious, okay?" Jamie said.

"I'll let you know. Thanks for coming by with the update," Joey said.

Dai followed Jamie back out to the door. "Thank you for coming by. He needed to apologize but he was afraid you wouldn't accept. This was a good compromise."

"He's my partner, even if it wasn't for very long. That's family, no matter what," Jamie said.

"Chosen family is sometimes stronger," Dai said.

"So very true," Jamie replied.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Mike sat on the roof of Jamie's new house and watched the party going on below. Jack, Joey, Dai, Sarge, Jack's son Avery, and a few others had gathered for a cookout and to watch the Sox in the playoffs.

"Don't you miss being down there?" his companion asked.

"I do," Mike said. "But I'm pretty lucky that I have a friend that is willing to make accommodations for me. He listens to me and helps me feel useful."

"And he solved your murder?"

"He did. Turns out my murder was an accident, but it was part of a chain of events that took down two criminal organizations before the case was done. That's pretty good teamwork, if you ask me."

"And you think he can figure out what happened to me?"

Mike turned to look at the teenager that sat beside him. "Noah? I think if anyone's going to figure it out, it'll be Jameson Kennedy. But he's not going to be doing it alone. I'm going to help."

"But you remembered some of what happened to you. I haven't. Well, not yet, anyway," Noah said.

"And they haven't found your body yet," Mike replied. "Once we figure that out, the rest will come."

Jack handed Avery a bottle of soda, then took a second one out of the cooler for herself. She shifted her chair a bit so the sun wasn't in her eyes, and carefully avoided looking at the young woman standing beside Avery's chair.

"I know you see me," the girl said.

Jack covered her mouth with her hand, her words barely audible. "Not here. Wait until later." A shiver ran through Jack as she took a swallow of her drink. She really wanted something stronger, but she was driving Avery back to campus after the cookout.

"Go to the bathroom, we can talk there," the girl said.

Jack got to her feet and set the soda on the arm of her chair. "Be right back," she told Avery and ducked into the house. The half bath was under the stairs and she stepped inside, locked the door, and turned on the water. "Ellis, you can't just show up and demand I speak to you. I've already had to rearrange my life because of this shit."

"Like I chose to die and end up being a ghost that only you can see?" Ellis replied. "I was twenty-two years old, clean, and trying to start a new life. My death? It's on your hands."

"No, your death is on Samson Rhodes' hands. He's the one that shot you. Quit playing the guilt trip card. It doesn't work. I had to give up my job, my friends, my family, my home – because you wouldn't leave me alone. You cause me trouble here? I'll ignore you until the end of time. I swear it," Jack hissed at the girl's shade.

"There's another ghost here," Ellis said. "I told him not to tell Jamie about me, so relax. His name is Michael Donovan. He talks to Jamie all the time."

Jack leaned back against the sink and stared at Ellis. "He...what?"

"Y'know how I talk to you? Mike talks to Jamie. You should probably talk to him about me. He's like the only person in the world who would understand."

“I don’t know. I’m still so new here,” Jack said with a sigh. “Look, just leave me alone today, okay? I want to spend time with my new team and with Avery. Come find me when I get home tonight if you need to chat.”

“Whatever,” Ellis said and disappeared.

Jack rested her head against the door and pulled herself together. What were the odds that she’d end up with the one partner that might understand? But could she really take that chance? The only reason she was able to get a new job was because her last boss kept the crazy talk out of her file – as long as she got out of his precinct. It had cost her everything.



Jack, Avery, Joey, and Dai had stayed behind to help clean up after the party. The Sox had won and were headed to the World Series, so the celebration had gone on after dark. Now he had the house to himself, and Jamie grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge and headed upstairs after he locked up and set the alarm. Elise had called earlier in the day and they’d had a really good conversation about the kids, about her life down there. Things seemed to be going really well. She was happy he’d got himself a home of his own and that Mike’s murder was wrapped up. Closure for the kids was important. He was going to head down there and room at Mr. Donovan’s place for a long weekend. He needed to talk to the kids about the case and spend some time with them. Elise and Mike’s father had come up with the plan and Jamie was all for it.

Malina had gained guardianship of Maxim – so he had a mom that loved him, watching over him now. They were staying in Paris, but with everything being sold off and dispersed after Drina’s conviction, they had enough money to live very comfortably while Max continued his studies.

Jamie had invested in Joey's PI business and it looked like he might actually get a return on his investment. Not that he was worried about that – it was just nice to see his friend happy and healthy.

"You done partying it up?" Mike said as Jamie sat on the side of the bed.

"Was a good time," Jamie said.

"I'm glad. No, really. You deserve some fun and relaxation," Mike replied.

"I'm going to sleep in tomorrow, then go for a run on the beach, and when I come back from Florida, I'm going to get myself a rescue dog. It's time I got myself a companion," Jamie said.

"Just don't get one of those little fluffball things. Get a dog that can run the beach with you," Mike suggested. "Speaking of companions, I have someone for you to meet."

"Another dead person?" Jamie asked.

Mike gestured to someone, then took the hand of a teenage kid.

"Aw, hell," Jamie said with a sigh.

"Jamie, this is Noah Riggs. He died sometime over the last twenty-four hours, but his body hasn't been found yet. Tomorrow morning, after your run, maybe you could help us look?" Mike asked.

"Like I'm gonna say no?" Jamie replied. "Hi, Noah. When it's daylight, I'll help you look. Maybe someone will have called in a missing person or something by then."

"Thank you, sir," Noah replied. "But no one will call it in. I live in a group home and they don't check who is and who isn't around every night. They kinda don't care much."

Jamie scrubbed his hands over his face and rolled fully onto his bed. "I'm too drunk and tired to even think clearly right now, so let me get some sleep and we'll work on it tomorrow."

“See?” Mike said. “I told you he’d help. That’s what we do. We solve murders. Even though I’m dead now, I still work with the best partner in existence.”

A faint snore drifted up from where Jamie lay across his bed.

“Uh huh,” Noah replied as he eyed Jamie’s half-dressed body sprawled across the top of the blankets. “If you say so.”

THE END

Want more?

Check out ***Dead Wrong***, the second book in the Partners in Crime series.

<https://books2read.com/Dead-Wrong>

A teenage boy is murdered and it’s up to Jamie and Jack to solve the case. Well, okay - Jamie, Jack, and the ghost of Michael Donovan.

Jack left her last job under peculiar circumstances and now she’s doing her best to hold on to her new job without it all blowing up in her face.

What are the odds that the only person that could possibly understand her situation would end up being her new partner?

How do the two of them explain where some of their information comes from, when the person giving it to them is the murder victim?

They’d better be right when they finally find the answers because it’s fatal to be dead wrong.

Preview of Dead Wrong

Chapter One

Noah checked his reflection in the window one more time before he got off the bus at the last stop on Shore Drive. He was finally starting to fill out, and it was about three months before he turned eighteen. He had started to think he'd never catch up to the other guys his age, but the time spent lifting weights was finally showing in the strain of his t-shirt across his chest and the tightness in the arms of his favorite button down shirt. Noah hoped he'd get a couple of new pairs of jeans before school started but living in the group home meant it was a crap shoot. He'd probably end up getting some hand me downs from the bigger boys when the Res noticed his jeans were too short. The new Resident in Charge, or Res, was the worst one yet. He spent all of his time on his laptop and had to be reminded to order groceries on a regular basis. They never lasted that long, so there wasn't really a point in trying to train the Res in how to take care of the twenty-five kids that lived in the house at any given time.

For Noah, he learned early that the only person he could truly count on was himself. He went to school, worked at the local fast food joint, and bought what he needed. Tonight was special, because he'd bought something for his girlfriend, Soraya. A delicate gold necklace with a heart that had been engraved

with their initials rested in a black velvet bag in his pocket – a token of their first six months together. It had taken him four of those months to save up enough to get the gift. No cheap stainless steel electroplated gold for his girl, no sir. Soraya was used to the finer things, so he couldn't be giving her some cheap crap for their

anniversary. There were only a few memories Noah had of his mother, and one was her telling him that you should start something as you mean to go on. Do it right, give it your best, because once you set the bar, you knew where the beginning of things would be and could mark your progress from there.

Someday he'd be able to buy her emeralds, diamonds, and rubies, but for now, it was just a tiny heart in real gold. He'd have to make sure to give it to her away from her friends. Noah knew they were only her friends and he was allowed to hang with them because she wanted him there. They were all children of the well-to-do in Harbor and he didn't belong. As far as the group were concerned, Noah ranked lower than the

kids of their household help – and he knew it.

Noah had met Soraya Halston at school when they'd been put in a group in Chemistry. Her humor, intelligence, and quick wit won him over as much as her honey blond hair and bright green eyes. Her best friends, Ashley Wentworth and Hailey Sewell had spent most of the past six months trying to talk Soraya out of being with him. The other two in their group, Montgomery "Monty" Weatherby and Spenser Newport had welcomed a third male, until they found out he was a throw-away kid. They tolerated him for Soraya's sake, but they went out of their way to make him feel uncomfortable. Noah just did his best to ignore the jabs and snarky comments so he could spend time with Soraya.

Tonight they were supposed to be having a bonfire on the cliff above the beach and Noah looked forward to cuddling with Soraya on one of the huge logs that surrounded the fire pit. He made his way along the path through the trees, the

light from the bonfire a beacon that led him on. Noah could hear the laughter and chatter of the group, his hand curled around the velvet necklace bag as he stopped to gather his nerve.

Noah had been so focused on seeing Soraya, he never heard the step behind him. The blow to the back of his head dropped him to the ground, the scent of pine needles strong as he tried to suck in a breath to scream. Nothing seemed to be working right. He felt hands grab him and lift him up, then he was flying through the air. Noah bounced once off the cliff wall, so he never felt himself land at the bottom. His last thought was of Soraya.

Get **Dead Wrong** here! <https://books2read.com/Dead-Wrong>

About the Author

T.K. Eldridge retired from a career in Intelligence for the US Gov't to write. The experiences from then are now being used to feed the muse for paranormal romance, mysteries, supernatural, and urban fantasy stories. When they're not writing, they are enjoying life in the Blue Ridge mountains of western North Carolina. Two dogs, a garden, a craft hobby and a love of Celtic Traditional music keep them from spending too much time at the computer.

You can connect with them on:

Website: <https://tkeldridge.com>

BookBub: <https://www.bookbub.com/profile/t-k-eldridge>

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