

## Chapter One

Detective Reid Sylver stepped inside her captain's office and tossed him an oatmeal muffin. He caught it one-handed and set it on a paper plate. She pulled up a chair on the other side of his desk and took a swig from the mug of coffee he'd prepared for her—black, with just a pinch of cinnamon.

“Was beginning to think you wouldn't show,” Cap said without looking up as he peeled the paper from his muffin.

Reid glanced at the clock on the wall behind his desk: 4:38 a.m. Eight minutes late for their breakfast and workout routine was a new record for her. “Bakery opened late,” she lied. The owner of the hottest bakery in Boston always handed her a bag with two oatmeal muffins as she passed on her morning walk to work. She returned the favor by making sure his car never got towed from the one-way street where it was illegally parked.

Chewing, she took one last look around the captain's office before finally meeting his gaze. They held eye contact for long seconds in silence. Reid had briefly considered not showing up at all this morning, but she didn't roll like that. Cap deserved better.

“Should I congratulate you or offer my condolences?” he asked, breaking the moment.

She threw a glance at Mugshot, who cocked his head and returned her gaze from his dog bed in the corner, an old tennis ball lodged firmly in his mouth. “He worked hard for that title,” she said proudly. They'd spent the weekend competing in Petaluma, California. Mug had won first place in the World's Ugliest Dog contest.

“Had a feeling the votes might swing in your favor.” He opened a drawer, withdrew a red gift bag, and slid it across the desk.

“What’s this?”

“Just open it.” He set a second gift bag on the floor and called Mug over.

Reid reached inside and pulled out a gray sweatshirt. *I’m with ugly* was stitched in navy blue across the front. She watched as Cap slid a sweatshirt over Mug’s head that read *Ugly and damn proud*. He worked Mug’s front paws into the small holes provided, for a perfect fit, digging into the gift bag again to hand Mug a new tennis ball.

Mug spit out the old tennis ball and trotted over with the new one. He set the ball in Reid’s lap and gazed up expectantly with his one remaining eye. Some asshole biker had set him on fire as a pup. Ironically enough, Mug’s breeding papers listed him as pick of the litter—a show-quality brindle bullmastiff. But nobody in their right mind would believe that now because he was a wrinkly, scarred, nearly furless mess. His ears were burned to nubs. One eye was sunken and sealed shut, damaged beyond repair by the flames.

“We’ll play fetch later,” she promised. “Thanks, Cap.” Finished with her muffin, she stood and extended her hand across the desk, her vision blurred by tears.

Cap stood from his chair and returned the gesture with the calloused grip of a hardworking cop. “Catch up with you later, Sylver.”

With Mug on her heels, she walked to the door. From this point forward, Reid would be heading to the gym alone.

From behind her, Cap said, “You really think there’s something on the other side?”

“I don’t *think*, sir.” She turned to face him. “I *know*.”

He studied her. “All these years, and we’ve never really talked about what you do. I didn’t want to know the details because, well, it scares the hell out of me.” He slid his hands in his pockets, shrugged, and looked at the floor. “I’m real sorry about that.”

“No need to apologize, Cap.”

“You deserve an apology. I just...” He looked her square in the eye. “I just want you to know, I think what you do is amazing. Gift or no gift, you’re one hell of a detective, Sylver. Don’t ever forget that.”

All she could manage was a nod as she stepped out from his office and shut the door.

Mug followed her to the gym, happily chewing his new tennis ball as he kept pace on the treadmill beside her. They’d just finished mile three when the sound of a gunshot cracked like a whip through the air. She powered down both treadmills, withdrew her earbuds, and wiped the sweat from her face with the towel around her neck.

This was the part she was dreading the most. No way around it. Someone had to find the captain and call it in. As a homicide detective, she’d certainly seen more than her fair share of bodies. But this one was personal.

She’d been working under the captain’s leadership for thirteen years. It hadn’t taken him long to figure out something was up when she breezed through her own cases and then dug up cold cases, solving those in record time, too. She thought back to the day he’d called her into his office, closed the door firmly behind her, and instructed her to take a seat.

*“What the hell is going on here, Sylver?” he asked.*

*“Boyle’s being a whiney little dickwad, Cap.”*

*He set his hands on his hips, towering above her. “Did you just use dickwad to describe a fellow detective to your commanding officer?”*

*“I could throw out some alternative descriptions if you want,” she said, unapologetic.*

*“Dickwad is the only G-rated word I could come up with on short notice.”*

*Shaking his head, Cap took a seat behind his desk. He leaned back in his leather chair and pierced her with a look of disapproval, bewilderment, and just a hint of admiration—an expression with which she was already well acquainted. He finally shook his head and chuckled, surprising her. “Off the record, I don’t disagree with your assessment of said dickwad.”*

*Boyle had held the record for cases solved six years in a row. She’d effectively ousted him from his throne. Now his nose was out of joint, and he was stomping around like an angry toddler.*

*“I’ve read your reports, Sylver. Things just aren’t adding up. I need you to be frank with me. How the hell are you solving these cases?”*

*“What’s on the line, sir?”*

*“Your ass. My ass.” He threw his hands up in frustration. “The communal ass of this department.”*

*She thought for a long moment before warning him. “You won’t like it.”*

*“Does it involve you being corrupt?”*

*She shook her head.*

*“Then lay it on me.”*

*She sighed. “I can talk to the dead, Cap.”*

*He laughed heartily and slapped his desk.*

*But she said nothing more and looked away, embarrassed.*

*He stopped laughing. The room was quiet, save for the ticking clock behind his desk.*

*“Jesus Christ. You’re not joking, are you?”*

*“I’ll hand in my resignation first thing tomorrow,” she said, standing. Conversations like this would only lead to mandatory sessions with the department shrink. She refused to go down*

*that road.*

*“Just hold on a minute.” Cap ran a hand over his face. “I’m not done with you yet, Sylver. Sit down.”*

*She did.*

*“So you’re telling me—”*

*“I can talk to dead people,” she finished for him. “Spirits. Ghosts. Apparitions. Whatever you want to call them.”*

*“Christ. Really?”*

*“Really.” She watched as he struggled to come to terms with this new information. She made a point of never telling anyone about her ability. She knew from experience it changed the way people looked at her. “By the way, your mom says you should never use the Lord’s name in vain.”*

*The captain narrowed his eyes. “You could’ve just pulled that out of your ass.”*

*“She also wants you to know she’s grateful you’ve kept her rosebush alive all this time. She loves the roses you leave at her grave every year.”*

*“Christ almighty.” The captain glanced at the ceiling. “Sorry, Ma.” He stood and paced the length of the room before turning to her. “How long’s this been going on?”*

*“As long as I can remember.”*

*“So, what, you interview a homicide victim, and they tell you who killed them and where to find the evidence?”*

*She nodded. That was pretty much the gist of it.*

*“Do you actually see them when they talk to you?”*

*She nodded again. “They look just like regular people. The only difference is—”*

*He held up his hand. "Forget it. I don't want to know." He paced the room some more, visibly stressed. "You can't breathe a word of this to anyone."*

*"Want me to cancel the press release I had scheduled for this afternoon?"*

*He stood in front of her, leaned against the front of his desk, and crossed his arms. "We need to find a way to plug up the holes in your reports before someone else figures this out."*

*"We?" she said, taken aback. "As in...you and me?"*

*"I'll keep you on Homicide. You keep...doing whatever it is you do. We'll meet here every morning before shift and write your reports together. I'll help you cover your tracks."*

*She hesitated. "What's the catch?"*

*"No talk about anything otherworldly."*

*Sensing there was more, she waited for him to go on.*

*"After we're finished dotting our i's and crossing our t's, we'll hit the gym. You can help me get back in shape." He patted his ample gut. "Wife's on a health kick and wants me to lose some weight."*

*Reid squinted. "That's it?" she asked, suspicious.*

*"That's it."*

*She stood. They shook hands to seal the deal. As she turned to leave, Cap called out, "Zero four thirty. Sharp."*

*"But, Cap, shift doesn't start till seven."*

*"Those are the terms." He returned to his leather chair. "Take it or leave it."*

And that was how thirteen years of muffins, cinnamon coffee, and workouts began—the best mornings of her life, by far. When Cap revealed he'd been diagnosed with an inoperable

brain tumor and that his neurological demise was imminent, he'd informed her of his plan to take his own life. He couldn't bring himself to do it at home or in his car—too painful a reminder for his wife. Sitting behind the desk from which he'd supervised countless detectives for nineteen years was where he wanted to be during his final moments.

She swallowed the lump in her throat as she realized her only friend in the world was now gone. He was the first person—the only person, ever, in her life—to have her back.

Reid left Mug in the gym and then waited by Cap's side until the medical examiners arrived.

Dr. Fred Grady, Chief ME, stepped inside and locked eyes on Reid. They'd sent the big gun for this one. No one messed around when it involved the death of a cop. "You found him?" Fred asked.

She nodded.

"Did he leave a note? Anything like that?"

"None that I found."

"You see him this morning?"

She nodded again. "We usually work out together. Said he wasn't feeling well, that he'd catch up with me later." Always best to stick with as much of the truth as possible.

Fred shook his head. She knew he and the captain went back a long time. His sadness was palpable. "Sorry you had to see him like this, Sylver."

"You, too, Fred." She cast one last look at the captain. "Take good care of him, huh?"

"Will do."

With a heavy feeling in her chest, she retrieved Mug from the gym, exited through the rear of the building, and drove home in an unmarked car. She set her duffel on the kitchen table,

unzipped it, and stared at the two red gift bags inside.

As if sensing her grief, Mug leaned against her leg in his characteristic show of support. She'd been wrong to think she'd lost her only friend. Mug was still here. She reached out to give him a reassuring pat on the back. Ever her faithful companion, he was her rock in life.

Reid slipped the sweatshirt over her head and grabbed a dry tennis ball from a bin near the back door. She played a long game of fetch with Mug in the backyard as a cold November breeze dried her tears.

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Reid's cell vibrated noisily on the nightstand. Tennis ball in mouth, Mug pawed at her from his place on the bed until she leaned over and picked it up. "Sylver," she answered, yawning.

"You coming in today or what?" Boyle asked.

She sat up and threw a glance at the bedside clock: 5:22 a.m. "What the hell, Boyle? Why're you calling me so damn early?"

"Because nobody's seen you in over a week. Better get your ass in here. Today."

She rubbed her temples, trying in vain to stave off the imminent hangover. "Or what?"

"Or you'll have the entire squad running lights and sirens to your house and breaking down your door."

Shit. She hung up on Boyle without another word.

Reid gazed longingly at the empty beer bottles on her nightstand. Looked like her plans with Sam Adams would have to be postponed until tonight.

She swung her feet over the side of the bed, waited until the room stopped spinning, and headed to the shower.

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Detective London Gold opened the closet door and took one last look at herself in the full-length mirror. Her long navy-blue blazer, heather-gray scoop-neck tee, charcoal slacks, and navy square-heel boots were the very definition of business casual. This was the big day. Everything had to be perfect.

She reached behind her neck and fastened a gold chain with a small cross pendant—the one her parents gave her for her first communion. Even though she hadn't seen her parents in over a decade—their choice, not hers—she wore this necklace, faithfully, every day. Part of her was sad they weren't here to celebrate with her. Someday, maybe they'd change their minds.

With eight years under her belt as a patrol officer, she'd finally been promoted to detective. The timing couldn't be better. A spot had just opened up in Homicide.

Becoming a homicide detective had been her dream since she could remember. But she was even more excited about the opportunity to learn from Reid Sylver. The woman was legendary. Not a single homicide case that crossed her desk in the last thirteen and a half years had gone unsolved. Those statistics were simply unheard of.

Reid was confident, intelligent, beautiful, and—if London's gaydar was functioning properly—gay.

London's heart picked up speed at the thought of spending her first few months as a detective with this incredible woman. Rubbing the cross between her fingers, she shook her head

and sighed. *Don't mess this one up, London. Keep your crush in check.*

## Chapter Two

Armed with her favorite travel mug, Red Sox ball cap, and the darkest pair of sunglasses she could find, Reid stepped off the elevator and made a beeline for her desk. The World's Ugliest Dog followed at her heels. With any luck, no one would even notice they were there.

"Hey, guys," Marino bellowed. "Look what the dog dragged in."

"What's with the sunglasses, Sylver? Tie one on last night?" Boggs winked.

"We can make these lights a little brighter if you want," Garcia said, jumping on the bandwagon.

"Talk a lot louder, too," O'Leary added at a volume that made her wince and wish she had earplugs.

"Fess up, boys." Reid calmly set her mug on the desk, took a seat, and spun around in her swivel chair to face the barrage of comedic detectives. "You missed me."

"Right." Marino scowled. "Missed you like bad BO."

"Yeah." Boggs laughed and gave Marino a high five. "Missed you like a plumber's ass crack."

"Like a kick in the nuts," Garcia pitched in.

Everyone looked at O'Leary and waited as he crossed his arms and stared at the floor in thought. Long seconds ticked by.

O'Leary finally looked up. "We missed you like a maggot-riddled cadaver on a hot summer day," he said, beaming and clearly proud of himself.

No one said a word as they continued to stare at O'Leary.

"What?" O'Leary shrugged. "I've been taking that creative writing class, you guys."

C'mon. That was the best one!"

Undoubtedly, word had spread that she'd found the captain's body. She'd worked alongside these detectives for over a decade. Perverted as it was, this was their version of a warm welcome back. The more you were razed, the higher their respect for you. She shook her head. Like it or not, this was the world she lived in.

Reid slid open her desk drawer and reached inside for a new tennis ball. Only five balls left. She made a mental note to replenish her stock soon. She picked up her trash can and held it under Mug's chin.

He looked at her suspiciously.

"Don't worry—I'll give you a new one," she assured him.

With a few more chews for good measure, he spit out the old ball and accepted the new one.

Boyle stepped out from the captain's office. "Sylver, a word?"

What the hell was Boyle doing in *there*? She took a swig of coffee, stood, and made her way across the room.

With Mug at her side, she stepped inside the captain's office. Boyle closed the door behind them. The smell of fresh paint slapped her in the face and made her hangover-induced nausea swell to seismic proportions. In stark contrast to the white walls that had yellowed with age, Cap's office was now a distinguished and very masculine dark blue.

She looked around, stunned. Everything was different. New desk, new chairs, new leather couch, new cherrywood file cabinet. Even the wood floors looked different. She'd never seen them so...shiny.

The only two things that remained the same were the clock and Mug's dog bed in the far

corner of the room—Boyle’s way of saying that she and Mug belonged here. The realization hit her hard. She was thankful for the dark glasses as her vision clouded.

Boyle took a seat behind the desk as Reid reached forward to pick up the new nameplate: *Lieutenant Adam Boyle*.

He watched her as she studied it. “Cap hounded me for years to take the exam. I finally did”—he shrugged—“just to shut him up.”

Reid nodded but said nothing. She couldn’t bring herself to speak just yet.

“Listen, Sylver. I’m not claiming I can fill Cap’s shoes—”

“Good. Because you can’t.” She felt a surge of righteous anger.

He fell silent and studied her once again.

The concern in his expression pissed her off even more. “Jesus, Boyle. What’s done is done. So if you’re finished with this kumbaya shit”—she stood—“I have cases to solve.”

“I know what Cap asked you to do,” Boyle said gently. “He told me.”

Shocked into silence, she sat back down.

“That’s why I took the exam. Cap wanted me to step in for him, when the time came.”

Cap’s old walnut clock ticked in the resultant quiet. Curiosity got the best of her. “What else did he say?”

“Said you’re the best detective he ever knew. Made me swear I’d have your back, no matter what.”

“And?” she asked suspiciously, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“Made me promise to quit smoking. Said to tell you I’m taking his place for the morning workouts.”

She laughed. Like *that* would ever happen. Boyle had been smoking a pack a day for as

long as she'd known him.

He shrugged out of his suit jacket and rolled up his sleeve to show her the nicotine patch on his arm. "Oh, and I like oatmeal muffins just fine," he added with a knowing smile.

Damn. She wasn't even that crazy about Boyle. "Fine. Be here at six a.m. tomorrow."

"He told me you'd try that. Schedule stays the same. See you at zero four thirty. Sharp."

"But shift doesn't start till seven."

"Rules are rules, Sylver. I'm not about to go back on my word to a dead man."

"Fine." *Damn you, Cap.* "But don't come crying to me if you keel over from a heart attack after the first lap."

Boyle called Mug over, pointed to a stainless-steel dual-compartment trash can, and stomped on one of the pedals. The lid on the left side popped up, revealing a treasure trove of bright yellow tennis balls. "Anytime you need a new one, pal, you just come in here and help yourself." He showed Mug how to step on the pedal with his paw. "And if you run out, there's always a backup supply." When Boyle stomped on the right-side pedal, the lid lifted to reveal an equally well-stocked compartment.

Prancing in place excitedly, Mug poked his head inside, plucked a tennis ball from the lot with his mouth, and hurried over to deposit it in Reid's hand. He promptly returned to the trash can, stepped on the pedal like a pro, and reached in for seconds.

Six years ago, Boyle had taken an instant liking to Mug. If Reid hadn't adopted him, she knew Boyle would have.

She and Boyle had been on their way back to the precinct, stopped at a red light at the corner of Mass Ave. and Melnea Cass. They'd watched from across the busy intersection as a heavysset man with a tattooed head and long beard poured gasoline over a puppy and set him on

fire. They'd bolted from the car—Boyle tackled the bastard to the ground while Reid worked frantically to douse the flames with the fire extinguisher she'd grabbed from the trunk.

When patrol officers arrived, they turned over the handcuffed perp and drove to Angell Animal Medical Center with lights and sirens the whole way. She and Boyle enlisted fellow detectives to take shifts at the hospital. From the time he was admitted, Mug was never without a BPD detective by his side. They held his paw as he whimpered in pain, spoke soothingly in the once-floppy ears that were burnt to nubs. That's when Mug's tennis ball obsession had started. He held the ball in his mouth like a pacifier. It stopped him from whimpering. It kept him calm.

Reid had had no intention of keeping Mug. She'd never even owned a dog before. Boyle—along with everyone else on the planet—wanted to adopt him. It was Mug who chose *her*. His bandaged tail thumped loudly against the sides of his metal crate whenever he heard her voice. He wouldn't eat for anyone but Reid and wouldn't allow anyone else to change his bandages.

She'd always wondered if Mug somehow sensed they'd been through something similar. As crazy as it sounded, she'd lay down her life for this dog. She knew he'd do the same for her.

Boyle pointed to the trash can. "I'll keep the right side stocked," he told her. "You take the left." He grimaced as Mug deposited a slimy ball in his hand and went back for thirds. "You could probably feed a small country with all the money you've spent on these things." He handed the ball to her and wiped his hands on his pants. "Figured the least I can do is share the expense."

"Thanks," Reid said, touched by the gesture. She stood, called Mug to her side, and turned to leave.

"One more thing, Sylver."

“What?”

“Fundraiser’s this weekend.”

Every year around Thanksgiving, organizations representing Boston’s police and firefighters hosted a weekend-long softball tourney to raise money for Christmas gifts for homeless kids. She’d been pitching for Cap’s team for the last thirteen years. They’d never lost a single game. “I’m not playing this year,” she told him. It just wouldn’t feel right without the captain.

“Maybe this’ll change your mind.” Boyle yanked open a desk drawer, pulled out Cap’s old glove, and tossed it to her. “He left it in his locker.”

“So?”

“Turn it over.”

She did. In black marker, Cap had crossed out his name and added hers.

She felt the tears well up and spill down her cheeks against her will.

“Left this, too. Gave us each one.” Boyle stepped over and held up two navy-blue T-shirts. One had Boyle’s name and team number on the back. *Team Captain* was printed on the front breast pocket.

“Good for you. You deserve it,” she said sincerely, her cheeks still wet.

“Read yours.”

With her name and team number on the back, hers looked the same as always. She flipped it over and read the fine print on the left breast pocket: *Co-Captain, aka Boyle’s muscle. Watch out, she’ll kick your ass if you don’t listen to Boyle.*

Laughing through the tears, Reid finally removed her sunglasses.

Boyle grinned and slapped her on the back. “Practice is Wednesday. Same place and

time.” He returned to the other side of his desk. “One more thing, Sylver.”

“You already said that.”

“Then...one more thing in addition to that other thing.”

She slid the well-worn leather glove over her hand, grateful to the captain for leaving it to her. “What?”

“You’ll call me *Lieutenant* from now on.”

“Fuck.” She wrapped the T-shirt around her neck and pretended to strangle herself. “You can’t be serious.”

“Dead. And I’m assigning you a trainee.”

“That’s not one more thing. It’s two.” If the new lieutenant couldn’t add, then they were in serious trouble. “Boyle, there’s no way in hell—”

“Lieutenant,” he said, a biting edge to his voice. He set his hands on his hips. She’d seen that look before. He meant business. “You’ll address me as *Lieutenant* from now on.”

“With all due respect, *Lieutenant*, I’m not cut out to be anyone’s babysitter.”

“Her name’s London Gold. She was just promoted to detective. Exemplary record. Solid cop. We’re lucky to have her. You’ll show her the ropes. Teach her everything you know.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then I guess another spot just opened up in Homicide,” he said, unflinching. He threw a glance over her shoulder at the window facing the squad room. “She’s sitting at your desk. Go make nice.”

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London watched as Detective Sylver stepped out from the lieutenant's office and marched straight toward her. She stood from the wooden chair. "London Gold," she said, extending her hand with a smile. "It's nice to finally meet you, Detec—"

"Can you run in those things?" Reid made no move to return the handshake.

"Run?" she asked, frowning.

"Those things you call shoes." Reid glared at her square-heeled leather boots. "Can you run in them?"

"Oh. I..." London followed her gaze. "I don't know. What do you mean by run?"

Reid sighed impatiently. "Can you do three miles on a treadmill?"

She looked up. Reid was even more beautiful up close. Short black hair accentuated piercing, bright green eyes. Even in flats, Reid was taller by at least a few inches. She looked strong, fit, and in control. "Probably not."

"Then why the hell would you wear those here today?"

"Are we running on a treadmill?" she asked, confused. "Because I have workout clothes in the locker room."

Reid set her hands on her hips. "If I have to chase after a suspect, will you be able to keep up during a foot pursuit in *those*?" Without giving London a chance to respond, Reid extended her index finger. "Lesson number one on how to be a good detective: dress for the job."

London glanced at Reid's sweatshirt. *I'm with ugly* was written across the front. She raised an eyebrow. "I was told business casual was appropriate."

"Sure, if you're working IA. Did you *want* to work for IA? Maybe you're in the wrong place."

She met Reid's green-eyed gaze. "I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. And I'm

excited to work with you, Detective Sylver.” She picked up her leather briefcase—the one she’d splurged on when she got the call about the opening in Homicide. Her initials were monogrammed on the side. “Give me a minute. I’ll go change into my sneakers.”

She headed off to the locker room, determined not to let Reid’s lack of enthusiasm diminish hers. Fellow officers had already warned her about the detective’s abrasive temperament, but London couldn’t be knocked off course. Her mission to be the best homicide detective she could be was already locked and loaded in her mind. The surest path to being the best was to learn from the best. She’d had a feeling this partnership would start out rocky. She was prepared to deal with whatever Reid dished out.

She tossed her boots into the locker, laced up her Adidas running shoes, and headed back to the squad room. Reid was nowhere to be found. The dog that went everywhere with her was also gone. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the elevator doors slide shut. She watched as the indicator to the floor below lit up. Reid, it seemed, had used the shoes as an excuse to duck out and ditch her.

Without bothering to grab her coat, she headed to the stairwell and jogged down the four flights of stairs to the rear parking lot where detectives kept their unmarked vehicles. She already knew which vehicle was Reid’s. It was impossible to miss—the only black 1980 Camaro Z28 in the lot. London was already leaning against the car with her hands in the pockets of her blazer by the time Reid and the dog sauntered over.

Keys in hand, Reid looked up and sighed. “You again?”

“Me again.”

“Thought I left you upstairs.”

“You did. But I’m fast in these.” She gestured to her running shoes. “If you were trying

to lose me, you should've kept me in the boots and sent me on a bogus coffee run."

Reid shook her head and sighed. "I'll keep that in mind for tomorrow. Get in." She opened the car door and pushed the passenger's seat forward.

London stepped aside for the dog to jump in, but the dog merely sat beside Reid and looked up at her quizzically. Nobody moved. They all just stared at one another.

"You getting in or what?" Reid asked.

"In the back?"

"Where else? Front's only big enough for two."

Without argument, London climbed in and contorted her body to fit in the tiny space. Reid released the front seat, and it sprang back and pressed painfully against her knees. The dog jumped in and promptly turned to stare at her. *Whatever it takes*, she reminded herself.

Reid walked around the car, slipped behind the steering wheel, and started the engine. London was about to ask where they were headed when Reid turned on the radio, surfed some local rock stations, and finally settled on "Another One Bites the Dust." She cranked the volume to high.

Not missing the irony of the moment, London rode in the back seat, silent. She only hoped her eardrums would still be intact when they reached their destination.

## Chapter Three

Reid tapped her thumbs on the steering wheel to the beat of the music as she drove. She couldn't believe the rookie had figured out her plan so quickly. Looked like this one was smarter than the average bear. She'd make a point to remember that moving forward.

*London Gold.* Maybe that's why Boyle had insisted on torturing her with this rookie. Sylver and Gold. Wasn't that just cute?

Who the hell named their kid London, anyway? Talk about a snobby, highfalutin name. Sounded like she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. Reid glanced in the rearview mirror as London gazed out the window. Ramrod straight, silky blond hair was cut in a perfect bob. She was the epitome of the wholesome all-American girl next door—large brown eyes, high cheekbones, full lips, and a petite nose with a sprinkling of freckles across the bridge. Manicured nails. Obviously smart, professional, well-mannered. Reid thought back to the Italian leather boots and expensive monogrammed briefcase. The rookie had Ivy League written all over her. Classic overachiever. What the hell was she doing at the BPD?

Reid turned down the music but kept her fingers on the knob. "Where'd you go to college?"

Chestnut-brown eyes met hers in the rearview mirror. "Why do you want to know?"

She shrugged. "Curious."

London looked away. "Harvard."

Figured. "How long were you in patrol?"

"Eight years."

She raised an eyebrow, surprised the rookie had lasted that long. A few weeks in

homicide should be enough to send her packing. Homicide was a very different world—much too dark and sinister for a wholesome, doe-eyed rookie.

“What about you?” London piped up from the back. “How long were you—”

Ignoring her, Reid turned up the volume, tapped her thumbs against the steering wheel to “Livin’ on a Prayer,” and focused on the road once again. She had no intention of sharing any information about herself whatsoever. Nothing. Nada. Zilch. Her storefront was closed for business and had been for quite some time. Which is why she worked best alone.

With no cases to work and no clear destination in mind—her sole mission had been to make a quick getaway—she headed for her favorite coffee shop near the Common. She’d just banged a right on Tremont when she saw the old woman in the middle of the road.

Nobody was stopping or even slowing down. Vehicles rushed past, completely disregarding the disoriented elderly woman in her pale green bathrobe and fuzzy slippers. For all intents and purposes, the woman looked real enough. But Reid knew she wasn’t.

Her body had perished and was most likely somewhere nearby. What Reid now saw standing in the road was merely the old woman’s ghost.

*Damn.* With the rookie underfoot, this one could prove to be tricky. She pulled to the side of the road and switched on the emergency light bars in the front and rear windows. She grabbed her travel mug from the cup holder, turned in her seat, and held it out to London. “Can you grab me a refill?” She dug in her pocket for some cash and nodded toward Peet’s Coffee. “Grab yourself one, too. On me,” she said, holding out a twenty-dollar bill.

“You won’t get any points for originality if you drive away while I’m on a coffee run. Remember, that was my idea.”

“Car stays here. You have my word.”

London accepted the cash and narrowed her eyes. "Where will you be?"

"Just right there. Tadpole Playground. Mug needs to do his business," she lied. Reid had a feeling that's where she'd find the old woman's body.

"At a kids' playground?" London asked, her tone disapproving.

Reid reached inside the glove compartment and held up a plastic grocery bag. "I always pick it up."

Just two weeks out from Thanksgiving, there was now a frosty chill in the morning air. She glanced at her watch: 8:42 a.m. It was still too cold this early to bring kids to the park, but the sun was out and it was supposed to warm up soon. Their arrival was imminent. She had no intention of letting a child stumble upon the old woman's corpse.

She opened her car door and stood, walking around to the passenger's side to let Mug out. "Meet you back here in fifteen," she said as she held the seat forward for London.

"You never told me."

"Told you what?"

"How you like your coffee."

London climbed out from the cramped back seat space with considerable grace, Reid noted, impressed. "No need. They know me there."

"Right. But I'm not you," London replied, looking at her like she was missing the obvious.

Reid pointed to the travel mug in London's hand. "They'll know that." The mug had been with her since her days at the academy. It had survived countless tumbles to the pavement from the roof of her car as she drove off in a hurry. The original blue color had mostly peeled away. With countless scratches and dents, it looked like it had once been the target of a mallet-wielding

psychopath.

London held the mug up for inspection and grimaced. “You like this thing so much you named your dog after it?”

“His name is Mugshot.” She attached the leash to his collar as he sat and waited patiently. “Mug for short.” Without another word, she turned and headed toward Tadpole Playground.

Thankful to be out of the rookie’s company, Reid let out a breath. No one had ever guessed that before. She had, in fact, named Mug after her lucky mug. It was lengthened to Mugshot by default when Cap and the other detectives assumed that was his full name.

Looked like this rookie was even smarter than a smarter-than-average bear.

She made sure no one was around when she cupped her hands around her mouth and called to the old woman in the middle of the road. “I can see you. There. Standing in the road.”

The old woman gazed back at her with a look of surprise.

“Yes. You.” She waved the old woman over. “Walk with me.”

She watched as the old woman shuffled across the street in her pale green bathrobe and fuzzy slippers, oblivious to the cars that passed right through her. Hazel eyes were now focused on her.

Reid fought to keep her feet firmly in place on the sidewalk. Once she acknowledged a spirit, she felt drawn to them like an industrial-sized magnet to iron. It had taken her years to resist the urge to go to them. Instead, she now waited until they came to her. It was safer that way, particularly when a spirit was standing in the middle of a busy road.

The old woman stepped over the curb and stood beside her on the sidewalk. She gazed up, her face stitched with concern. *Something awful happened, dear.*

“I’m here to help,” Reid assured her. “Let’s go for a walk.”

The old woman nodded. “This way,” she said, already leading Reid through the gates of the playground.

They walked in silence. Reid glanced over her shoulder to make sure London wasn’t following. Satisfied the rookie was stuck in a long line of coffee lovers by now, she turned back to the old woman. “Can you tell me your name?”

*It’s Beatrice, dear. Beatrice McCarty.*

“Nice to meet you, Beatrice. I’m Detective Sylver. This is my partner, Mug.” Mug wagged his tail at the mention of his name and looked directly into the old woman’s eyes. Reid knew from their years on the streets together that Mug saw spirits just as clearly as she did. As far as she could tell, this wasn’t the norm for dogs. She had an inkling Mug’s close brush with death as a pup had something to do with it. But she would never know for sure.

*Kind of an ugly mug, wouldn’t you say?*

“He’s beautiful, once you get to know him.”

Before she knew it, they were standing in front of the old woman’s body. She’d been duct taped to one of the park’s sand-colored slides, clad in the same pale green bathrobe and fuzzy slippers. She was lying down with her arms raised above her head and her eyes closed. Her face had been molded into an expression of joy. Whoever did this had staged the scene to make it look as though the old woman was enjoying herself on the playground slide.

The staging was obviously significant.

Careful not to touch anything, Reid ordered Mug to stay put and stepped over to get a closer look. Judging from the sunken-in cavities below the frontal bone, it appeared the old woman’s eyes had been removed and her eyelids sewn shut. There were no other visible wounds on Beatrice’s body. “Can you walk me through what happened?”

*I was taking my mail out of the mailbox and felt a sharp pain in my back. Then another. And another. I fell down on my porch. She looked over at Reid. That's all I remember.*

Sounded like Beatrice was stabbed in the back, which would explain why there were no visible wounds on the front of the body. But she'd have to wait for the ME's report to know for sure.

She stood, careful not to disturb the mulch underfoot as she returned to Beatrice's side. "Did you see who did this to you?"

Beatrice shook her head. *I'm afraid not. The last thing I remember seeing was a yellow envelope from my granddaughter. I think there was a birthday card inside. She smiled proudly. Meghan always remembers my birthday.*

Reid suspected the murder had occurred sometime in the past twenty-four hours. Rigor mortis was in full swing. Beatrice's body was as stiff as a tree trunk. Most people weren't aware that there were two stages to rigor mortis: the rigor stage, where the muscles stiffened gradually over a period of about twelve hours and maintained that rigidity for another twelve hours, and the flaccid stage, where the muscles gradually became more relaxed over the next twelve hours. A corpse could effectively go from a state of unyielding rigidity to squishy pliancy in a thirty-six-hour period.

Reid cleared her throat. "Do you remember what day it was when you checked your mail?"

*Of course, dear. It was Saturday. I play bingo every Saturday at Saint Mary's. It's in Waltham, she added as an afterthought. I checked the mail that night as soon as I got home.*

"Around what time was that?"

*I'm not sure, exactly. Beatrice thought for a moment. Around ten, I think.*

If Beatrice was, in fact, murdered Saturday night, her body should have entered the flaccid stage by now. She frowned. Something wasn't adding up here. Maybe the ME would shed some light on the time discrepancy. "Do you remember your address?"

*Well, I should hope so! I've lived in that house for over half a century.* Beatrice recited her address without skipping a beat.

Instinct told Reid the killer was on the outer periphery of Beatrice's life—someone with whom this woman was probably unfamiliar. She couldn't explain how she knew this, but her instincts were usually right. At times, she wondered if these feelings were just thinly veiled psychic abilities. She was often tempted to open her mind to other information, but she fought it. There was simply no room in her life for more weird shit. Communicating with dead people was where she drew the line. "Can you think of anyone who'd want to hurt you?"

Beatrice shook her head as she gazed down at her body. *No one I know would ever do something like this.*

"Is there anything else you can remember?" Reid asked. "Anything at all that might help me find who did this to you?"

Beatrice thought for a moment. Her face lit up as she met Reid's gaze. Even spirits could have an aha! moment. *Someone left a single white rose on my porch a few days ago, she recalled. It was the most perfect flower I'd ever seen.*

"Was there a note?"

*No note. Just the flower. I thought it was odd. I never did find out who left it there.*

Interesting. "Did you keep it?"

The old woman nodded. *I put it in a vase and gave it some water. It's on my kitchen windowsill.*

Reid made the call to dispatch, reported the body, and requested patrol officers for a perimeter around the park. With any luck, the park would be locked down before long. She ended the call and slipped Mug a biscuit from her pocket.

*Will you catch him?* Beatrice asked. *Before he does this to someone else?*

She shared Beatrice's concern. Instinct kicked in once again, warning her there'd be more victims. "Truth be told, you're not giving me a lot to go on here, Beatrice. I'll do the best I can." She cleared her throat self-consciously as she saw London approach from the corner of her eye.

London handed her the battered mug and froze, wide-eyed, as she stared at the old woman's body. "She's dead?"

"Looks like that Ivy League education paid off."

Ignoring her, London quickly surveyed the park. "Who reported it?"

"Me."

She turned her attention to Reid. "You sent me for coffee when you knew there was a body?"

"I didn't *know* anything," Reid said in her own defense. "I found her like this."

"You expect me to believe you pulled to the side of the road on a whim and just, what, stumbled upon this crime scene?"

Reid shrugged. "Believe whatever you want."

London narrowed her eyes as she took a sip from the disposable cup in her hands. "Who were you just talking to?"

"Dispatch. I called it in."

"No. I saw you end that call and put your phone in your pocket. Then you said something to someone named Beatrice."

Shit. Reid tried to think on her feet but came up empty. Best way out of this one was flat-out denial. Before she could open her mouth, two BPD bike officers raced toward them, braked in unison, and gaped at the body.

She held out her badge. “Detective Sylver,” she said, grateful for the well-timed rescue. “Block off all entry points. Make sure no one gets in.”

The female officer glanced over her shoulder. “Channel Four News was right behind us.”

The last thing she needed was help from an ambitious reporter. She already had her hands full with an ambitious rookie. Reid sighed. “Just keep them the hell away from my crime scene.” The minute local news learned a killer was targeting the elderly, all hell would break loose. Frightened senior citizens would be banging down the precinct doors.

Nodding, the patrol officers mounted their bikes and raced toward the park’s entrance.

“We’re taking this case?”

“I’m taking this case. It’s in my jurisdiction and obviously a homicide.”

“But what if it’s not?”

“Not what?”

“A homicide,” London said, studying the body.

“You think the victim just duct taped herself to the slide, removed her own eyes and stitched her eyelids shut, and then—what—died of natural causes?”

“What if she died of natural causes and *then* someone brought her here?”

“Why the hell would someone do that?”

“I have no idea. My point is, we won’t know it’s a homicide until the ME decides cause of death.”

“Cause of death was—” She stopped herself, realizing she’d almost gone too far.

“Was what?” London prompted, stepping toward the body for a closer look. “No signs of external trauma, from what I can see. Am I missing something?”

“We’ll know soon enough.” She watched as the forensics team unloaded their equipment from a white van and carried it over.

“So”—London started to shiver—“what now?”

For the first time since they’d left the precinct, she realized London wasn’t wearing a coat. She’d no doubt left it behind in her attempt to beat Reid to the car. “We wait,” she replied calmly, unaffected by the cold.

## Chapter Four

London had no idea why Reid was trying to pull the wool over her eyes. Reid had parked on the street and sent her on a bogus coffee run so she could check out the park by herself. At least that much was clear. But how did Reid know there was a body in the playground? Had someone tipped her off? None of it made any sense.

She flashed back to Reid's conversation with someone named Beatrice. Something told her the name was important. Reid had ended the conversation in a hurry as soon as she'd approached. Like she was hiding something.

London intended to find out exactly who Beatrice was. Maybe Beatrice was in on this somehow—whatever *this* was.

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Still shivering, London piped up from the back seat, "Where are we going now?"

"To the precinct. To get your coat."

"How did you know?"

"The blue lips and violent shivering gave it away."

"No, not that." London sighed. "You were so sure it was a homicide before they even flipped the body over. What did I miss?"

"Nothing. Just a gut feeling."

"Does that happen a lot? You get a gut feeling, and it turns out to be right?"

This was one nosy rookie. "Any cop worth their weight in salt gets gut feelings after the

first few months on the job,” she said evasively. She pulled up to the BPD, climbed out, and walked around to the passenger’s side. Mug scooted over to the driver’s seat as she reached inside and held the passenger’s seat forward.

London looked up but made no move to exit the car.

“Coat. Remember?” Reid prompted.

“Are you coming inside, too?”

She shook her head. “Mug and I will wait here.” But she had no intention of waiting. She and Mug would be peeling rubber in about ten seconds.

London sat back in her seat and refastened her seat belt. “No.”

“No?” Reid repeated, incredulous.

“I am *not* getting out of this car without you.”

“I’m already out of the car. It’s you who’s still inside the damn car.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I don’t. Enlighten me.”

London locked her chestnut gaze on Reid. “I’m not going inside that building without you.”

“And why the hell not?”

“Because as soon as I walk in, you’ll drive away and leave me here.” She paused, searching Reid’s face. “You have a plan up your sleeve, something you’re itching to do that’s relevant to the investigation. I intend to be there to see it. I’m here to learn from you, Detective Sylver. Not read about how you solved the case later in some report.”

Damn. London was on to her. “Suit yourself.” She pushed the seat back, and Mug returned to his rightful place.

Having this rookie around asking endless questions and scrutinizing her every move would only slow things down and hamper the investigation. How the hell was she supposed to work under these conditions?

She walked to the driver's side and slipped behind the wheel once again. For the time being, it seemed they were glued at the hip. The way she saw it, she had three choices—find more creative ways to lose the rookie, keep working the case with the rookie underfoot without giving anything away, or leave the job altogether. She'd just reached her twenty-year mark a few months ago. Retirement was always an option.

London leaned forward from the back seat and was promptly rewarded with a quick lick to the nose from Mug.

*Traitor.*

London smiled and gave him a scratch under the chin. "Where are we off to now?"

"Making a pit stop in Waltham."

"What for?"

Reid shrugged. "Just something I want to check out."

"Related to the investigation?"

She met London's eyes briefly in the rearview mirror, neither confirming nor denying.

"I knew it," London said, grinning broadly. "What's the plan?"

"Bingo."

London frowned. "Come again?"

"The vic was old. Old people play bingo."

"Oh." London looked like someone had let the wind out of her sails. "I'm risking hypothermia to interrogate senior citizens?"

“The risk wasn’t worth the payout, I assure you.”

“There must be dozens of spots around town that host bingo. Why are we driving all the way to Waltham?”

“Shit. Do you always ask so many damn questions?”

“I do when the best detective in Homicide—the one I’m supposed to be learning from—keeps everything close to the vest.”

“Nice one. I see what you did there. Flattery to get me to open up and share.”

“Did it work?”

“Solid effort.” She met London’s gaze briefly in the rearview mirror before returning her focus to the road. “But no.”

Not in the least bit ruffled, London persisted, “At least let me in on how you chose this particular location.”

“Easy. They have the biggest jackpot.” But she had no idea how big their bingo jackpot was, or even if there was one. Her knowledge of the game was limited to someone shouting *Bingo!* upon winning. Money had to be involved, right? Why else would anyone play? She should’ve asked Beatrice more questions when she’d had the chance. From now on, she’d be more adept at covering her tracks with this helicopter rookie.

Reid pulled into the parking lot behind Saint Mary’s and cracked the windows. She climbed out and called Mug to follow her out her door. Ignoring London, she slammed the door and started toward the church entrance.

London called out through the cracked car window, “Hey, you forgot someone back here.”

She halted in her tracks, returned to the car, and leaned over to talk into the crack. “I

didn't forget. How could I possibly forget the rookie who insists on making more work for me by asking a million questions? Way I see it, you need to start thinking about ways to pull your own weight around here. Least you can do is figure out how to let yourself out of the car."

Reid straightened and walked briskly to the church entrance with Mug at her side. She smiled, pleased with her own aptitude for thinking outside the box. The passenger's side lock was childproof and could only be opened from the outside. The seat on the driver's side didn't push forward—it had been stuck in the same position for years.

That should buy her at least a little time alone.

She stepped through the doorway and gazed around the near-empty church. A solitary nun was praying at a pew near the front. She took a deep breath and let the quiet wash over her, a luxury she'd be sure never to take for granted again.

The stillness was short-lived. She and Mug spun around as the door swung open behind them.

London strolled over with a grin, evidently proud of herself.

Reid sighed. "You again?"

"Me again."

"How the hell did you get out so fast?"

London looked down and lifted her foot. "These sneakers give me superpowers, allowing me to escape from even the most challenging childproof locks."

"If you broke a window to get out, so help me—"

"I broke a window to get out," London blurted.

Reid felt her blood pressure skyrocket. "Seriously?"

London took a step back and nodded. "I'll pay for it," she added quickly.

“You bet your goddamn ass you’ll pay—”

“Pardon me?” the nun asked as she marched toward them, rosary in hand. Her habit framed a plump wrinkled face with intelligent blue eyes. “You’re not using the Lord’s name in vain *here*, are you?” She crossed her arms and cast a stern, tightlipped glance at Reid.

“No, Sister.” It occurred to Reid that telling a lie here, of all places, was probably a bad idea. “I mean...yes, Sister. But it’s a good thing my old boss isn’t here. He used the Lord’s name in vain *way* more than I do.” Nuns had always made her uncharacteristically nervous and prone to babbling. “He’s dead now,” she added, giving herself a mental dope slap.

“Maybe that’s why,” the nun said coldly.

The three of them stood together awkwardly.

The nun winked. “That was a joke. A very bad one, I’m afraid. Forgive me.” She put her hands together and bowed her head. “I’m very sorry for your loss.”

Reid would have laughed if she wasn’t busy feeling so damn intimidated. “Detective Sylver,” she said, extending a clammy hand. “This is...this is...” she stammered, suddenly at a loss as to how to refer to the rookie beside her.

“Detective Gold,” London finished, offering a well-manicured hand to the nun. “You’ll have to forgive my partner. I’ve been standing on her last nerve since we met.”

The nun reached back. “Sister Margaret Mary,” she replied with a genuine smile. “How long have the two of you been partners?”

London flicked her wrist and checked her Apple watch. “Six hours and twenty-two minutes,” she said in a chipper tone.

Reid shook her head and sighed. “Longest six hours of my life.”

Sister Margaret glared at Reid in the same faultfinding, hypercritical way that all nuns

seemed to have mastered. She'd been rubbing nuns the wrong way as far back as she could remember. It all started back in kindergarten at the Catholic school she'd attended. Her first teacher, Sister Nancy, had made it her life's mission to convert Reid from a tomboy into a proper young lady. Needless to say, it hadn't gone well. Seeing Sister Nancy's face after she stole a pair of buzz cutters and shaved her head in second grade still ranked in the top ten of her favorite memories.

Reid ran her fingers through the hair that she kept short, like her fingernails. She'd never grown her hair long again after that.

Sister Margaret's expression softened as she studied London. "That's a beautiful cross."

Smiling, London reached up to rub the cross between her fingers. "My parents gave this to me for my first communion."

"Do you still attend mass?"

London shook her head.

"And your parents?" Sister Margaret asked. "Do they attend?"

"Honestly, I'm not sure." London let her hand fall away from the cross as she returned the nun's gaze with a palpable sadness. "They haven't spoken to me in ten years."

Reid's curiosity was piqued. Why in the world would two parents cease contact with this perfect rookie?

"I'm sorry to hear that." Sister Margaret stepped closer to London and took both her hands. "We're all children of God, learning, growing, forgiving—"

"If you'll excuse us for a moment, Sister." Reid grabbed London by the elbow, led her away, and whispered, "When you're done with family therapy, can you ask her if she recognizes our vic?" She retrieved Beatrice's photo from her phone and held it out to London.

“Why don’t you ask her?” London whispered back.

“Because she’s giving me the evil eye.”

“You’re afraid of a nun because she *scolded* you?”

“I’m not afraid. Let’s get that straight.”

“Then go ask her yourself.” London handed the phone back.

“Come on, this is your chance to shine. Besides, you’ve built a rapport with her. She likes you.”

“Only if you admit it.”

“Admit what?”

“You’re afraid of the nun.”

“Fine.” Reid sighed. “Maybe I find her a little intimidating.”

“And you won’t beat me up when we get to the car and you see the broken window.”

“Don’t push it.”

London extended her hand. “Fine. Give it here.”

Reid handed over the phone and stayed put as London returned to the nun. Pulling Beatrice’s name and address out of thin air obviously wasn’t an option with her new sidekick in tow. All they needed was an identity so she could drive to Beatrice’s house and get this investigation officially underway.

With Mug at her side, she watched London and Sister Margaret from across the room. Sister Margaret made the sign of the cross when London held up the phone with Beatrice’s photo. They talked for several minutes and then shared a warm embrace. Sister Margaret stepped to the front of the church, lit a candle, and promptly knelt in prayer.

Reid frowned. No nun had ever hugged *her*.

London returned and held the phone out but said nothing.

She followed London to the back of the church. She could be mistaken, but the rookie seemed suddenly angry. “Well?” she asked as they stepped outside. “Did she recognize our vic or what?”

London nodded.

Reid could all but see the steam coming out of her ears. “And?”

London set her hands on her hips. “What game are you playing?”

“Huh?” The busted window on her prized Camaro Z28 granted her exclusive rights on the pissed-off cop face that London was now wearing.

London started pacing. “What I don’t understand is why you dragged me all the way out here if you already knew the victim’s name.”

Oh. That. “I didn’t know our vic’s name. Still don’t. So?” Reid tossed her hands up in frustration. “What the hell is it?”

London stopped pacing. “*Beatrice*,” she said sarcastically.

Reid kept her poker face. “Does Beatrice have a last name?”

“You’re just going to stand there and pretend you didn’t know?”

“Know what?” Reid asked, still playing dumb.

“That the vic’s name was Beatrice!” London shouted.

“How the hell would I know that?”

“I heard you, Sylver. I heard you say that name clear as a bell when I brought you your coffee this morning. Which I spat in, by the way.”

“You did?”

“No. But I wish I had.”

That was the last time Reid would send the rookie on a coffee run. “I assure you, *that* name did not come out of *my* mouth this morning.”

“So you’re saying I imagined it?”

“I don’t know.” Reid frowned as she studied the ground and pretended to give the question serious thought. “Are you psychic?”

“What?”

“Psychic.”

“Of course not. I don’t believe in that stuff.”

“What other explanation is there?”

“The only plausible explanation is that you’re playing some kind of prank on the newbie.”

“Rookie,” Reid corrected. “And no. In case you haven’t noticed, I’m not the type.”

London laughed dryly, apparently unconvinced. “Whatever you say.”

They were standing in front of the car now. To Reid’s surprise, all of the windows were intact. “Thought you said you broke a window to get out.”

“I was joking.”

Now it was her turn to get all angry and indignant. “Well, isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black?”

“You deserved it after you locked me in the car like a prisoner.”

“At least I left the windows cracked.”

London opened the passenger’s door, climbed in the back seat, and returned the seat to its upright position for Mug.

Reid slipped behind the steering wheel once again. “You going to give me the vic’s last

name or what?"

"Like you don't know."

"I don't."

London gazed out the window. They sat in silence.

"Are you seriously forcing me to face the scary nun again?"

"It'll be good for you. Sister Margaret will set you on the righteous path of honesty."

Damn. London was calling her bluff. "Fine. I'll be right back. Don't break any windows while I'm gone."

## Chapter Five

London watched Reid jog back to the church. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't—for the life of her—figure out what game Reid was playing. Had it all just been some kind of test? If she hadn't seen the ME zip up the body bag, she'd be wondering if there was really even a body at all. The more likely explanation was that Reid had staged everything for her benefit. But that obviously wasn't the case, either. The body was real.

Why would Reid not only deny knowing the victim's name but drag her all the way out here pretending she didn't know? This trip had been a giant waste of time.

She shook her head and sighed, frustrated with Reid's reticence to share information. To get what she needed, she'd have to be more creative and think outside the box from now on.

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Reid stepped quietly inside the church. Sister Margaret was still kneeling, deep in prayer. Fairly certain it was a cardinal sin to disturb a praying nun, she leaned against the wall and waited. She didn't really need to talk to the nun—Beatrice had already shared her last name when they'd talked earlier that morning. All she had to do was stay put for the few moments it would take to acquire such information.

Straightening to leave, she turned and bumped into the holy water font near the church entrance. The copper bowl toppled, spilling its precious contents all over the front of her jeans and sneakers. It landed on the marble floor with a thunderous *clang*.

She cringed. So much for sneaking out.

Sister Margaret was at her side in seconds, scowling. “Spilling holy water on oneself is an act of sacrilege.”

Reid felt her eyes grow wide.

“Another bad joke, I’m afraid.” Sister Margaret winked. “To what do I owe the honor of two visits in one day?”

“Just one more question, Sister. What was Beatrice’s last name?”

“I already told your partner.”

“I realize that. But she...”

“Forgot?”

“Not exactly.” Reid hesitated. “She just...won’t tell me.”

“And why is that?”

“She thinks I already know.”

“Do you?”

Reid’s knee-jerk reaction was to lie. But she stopped herself, wondering if she’d be forever cursed if she lied. In church. To a nun.

“It’s a simple yes or no question, Detective Sylver. Do you already know Beatrice’s last name?”

Reid hung her head. “Yes, Sister.”

“Then why are you here asking me a question you already know the answer to?”

“Because I can’t tell the other detective how I found out.”

The nun frowned. “Exactly how *did* you find out?”

“I was kind of hoping you wouldn’t ask about that.”

“Well, I did.” She crossed her arms and tapped her black shoe impatiently on the

church's marble floor. "I'm waiting for your answer, Detective Sylver."

Reid hesitated, bracing herself. "The victim told me."

"Beatrice?"

She nodded.

"But your partner said she's dead."

She sighed. "Thus, my dilemma."

Sister Margaret's expression remained unchanged. "You can communicate with spirits."

Reid said nothing and simply waited for the onslaught of scorn and judgment. She'd been down this road before in her youth. Which is why she stayed as far away from the Catholic church as humanly possible. "Go ahead," she prompted.

"Go ahead and what?" Sister Margaret asked, looking genuinely baffled.

"Judge me. Harshly. The way only a nun can. Then tell me I'm doing the devil's work and implore me to schedule an exorcism with the reverend father."

"I beg your pardon? I'll do no such thing."

"Another joke, right?"

"God gave you a gift. You're using that gift to help thy fellow man."

Reid pretended to unplug her ears. "Come again, Sister?"

"You heard me. Our job as mere mortals isn't to pass judgment. It's to help our fellow man realize and execute the plan that God has set forth for us. You're already doing that. God would be proud."

Few situations in her forty years on earth had rendered her speechless. This definitely ranked as one of the most surreal moments of her life.

"Come back to the Church." Sister Margaret reached over and gave her hand a gentle

squeeze. “You’re welcome here anytime, Detective Sylver.”

Reid shook her head and took a step back. “The Catholic church won’t welcome me.” She felt her guard slipping back in place. “I’m gay.”

“Well, in that case” —Sister Margaret crossed her arms and frowned—“I’m afraid I must rescind the invitation.”

Reid nodded, surprised to discover she was actually a little disappointed as she turned to leave. “Thanks for your time.”

Sister Margaret called out from behind her, “Have you completely lost your funny bone, Detective?”

Reid glanced back and watched as the nun’s stern expression broke into a beautiful smile. “You have a very dark sense of humor, Sister.”

“So I’ve been told. I expect to see you at Sunday mass. Nine sharp. And bring your partner. I get the feeling she was driven from the church for the very same reason.”

“You think she can talk to dead people, too?” Reid asked, confused.

“No. The other reason,” Sister Margaret said, shaking her head. “And you call yourself a detective?”

It took her a moment to realize what Sister Margaret was saying. London was a lesbian? How the hell could a nun’s gaydar be better than hers?

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Back inside the car, Reid met London’s gaze in the rearview mirror. “Hope you don’t have any plans for Sunday.”

“What’s on Sunday?” London asked suspiciously. “Another prank?”

“Sister Margaret invited us to mass.”

London leaned forward, her eyes wide with surprise. “She invited *you*?”

Reid turned in her seat. “Is that so hard to believe?”

“As a matter of fact, it is.”

London’s face was uncomfortably close to hers in the confines of the car. For the first time since they’d met, Reid realized how beautiful London was. “Sister Margaret even held my hand,” she admitted proudly.

“Congratulations.” London sat back and gazed out the window. “But I can’t go back to the Catholic church.”

Was Sister Margaret right about London? She couldn’t tell for sure one way or the other. She felt the first stirrings of curiosity and suddenly found herself craving more information on this rookie. “When she invited me to mass, I told her I was gay. Figured that would earn me a lifetime exemption.”

London stared at her. “And?”

“No such luck. It appears the Catholic church—or, at least, this one—is finally coming out of the Dark Ages.”

“No way. You’re still invited?” London looked just as shocked as Reid felt. “Even though you’re…”

“Gay? You can say it, you know. It’s not contagious.”

“Too late.” London rolled her eyes. “I already caught it.”

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Reid pulled up to Beatrice's quaint ranch-style house and parked on the street. She cracked the windows and told Mug to stay as London climbed out of the car. They were entering a crime scene now, and Mug wasn't allowed.

"He's okay in the car?" London asked, looking doubtful.

"Mug's better behaved than most humans. He'll be fine." She and Mug went everywhere together. After six years, he probably knew their routine better than she did.

Reid realized she depended on him as much as he depended on her. Communicating with spirits on a daily basis was draining and, at times, overwhelming. Most days, it left her totally depleted. Mug's constant presence in her life kept her grounded. The upside to their relationship: no talking—or listening—was required. She preferred it that way. In her eyes, Mug was the embodiment of the perfect partner.

Which was another reason this rookie was grating on her nerves. The endless stream of questions made it difficult to focus and diverted her attention from the case. It was like trying to play the cello while having a conversation. She knew from experience it was possible to do both at the same time, but the quality of the music inevitably suffered.

Beatrice appeared the moment she set foot on the porch. The old woman smiled in recognition. *You made it.*

"We made it," Reid replied.

"Made what?" London asked from behind her.

Beatrice pointed to the outdoor area rug under Reid's feet. *That's where it happened.*

"Hold up a minute," she said, halting London on the steps behind her. She reached inside her coat pocket and withdrew two pairs of latex gloves. She handed a pair to London. "From this

point forward, we don't touch anything with our bare hands. Take care to preserve everything exactly as is." Slipping the gloves on, she squatted down and lifted one corner of the rug.

"Is that dried blood?" London asked, pulling on her gloves as she squatted down beside her.

"Looks like this is where our vic was stabbed." Reid carefully lifted the rug the rest of the way to reveal telltale brown stains and droplets along the wooden planks.

*Told you, Beatrice said matter-of-factly. But I'm not sure how the rug got there. It's not mine.*

The killer must have put it there to cover the evidence. Interesting. Either he brought it with him—which meant the murder was entirely premeditated—or he stole it from a neighbor's porch after the fact. She dismissed the idea that he returned after moving the body just to cover the bloodstains—too risky. Sticking a mental Post-it in her mind, Reid withdrew her cell and dialed Forensics.

"How'd you know to look under the rug," London asked as soon as she hung up.

"When you're working a crime scene, you start from the bottom and work your way up. No stone unturned."

"But we weren't even sure this *was* the crime scene. For all we knew, our vic was abducted from her home and stabbed elsewhere."

Reid shrugged. "Well, now we know she wasn't. Let's suit up and get a look inside." London followed her to the car.

"Protocol says we're supposed to refrain from entering the premises until Forensics—"

"One thing you'll learn about me is I don't follow *all* the rules. Just the important ones." She handed London a sealed plastic package with a white Tyvek suit and booties inside.

“But waiting until Forensics clears the crime scene is a pretty important rule.”

“It is if you don’t know what you’re doing.” Reid stepped onto the sidewalk and pulled the suit over her clothes, leaning against the car as she slipped the booties over her sneakers.

“Follow my lead, and you’ll be fine. Do *not* mess up my crime scene. Understood?”

London nodded.

She waited for London to gear up before leading the way back to Beatrice’s porch.

*You have to wear all that just to go inside my house?* Beatrice asked.

Ignoring the question, she met Beatrice’s gaze. “If I were a key, where would I be hiding?”

“Under the mat?” London offered, kneeling to take a peek.

Beatrice led her to the side of the porch and pointed to the corner. *Right there, dear.*

Reid reached between the wooden railings and lifted the key from the nail it was hanging on. “Found it,” she said, holding it up for London to see.

London stood. “How’d you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Find the key. What made you think to look way over there?”

“You get pretty good at finding things when you’ve been doing this as long as I have.”

She unlocked the front door, and they both stepped inside.

Reid took in her surroundings. The house was cozy, sparsely decorated, and very clean. Living room to the right. Office space to the left. Eat-in kitchen off a short hallway, dead ahead. Bedrooms were probably on the other side of the house.

Beatrice stood beside her. *He left a note for you in the kitchen.*

“Where do you want to start?” London asked.

Asking Beatrice to elaborate wasn't exactly an option at the moment. "Kitchen," Reid replied, already on her way.

There, in the center of the countertop breakfast bar, was a handwritten note in bold black marker: *Sylver—I know your secret.*

The note was held in place by a clear glass vase containing what had once been a single white rose. All that remained in the vase now was a flowerless stem. The rose itself had been cut off and placed, upside down, on one corner of the note.

London frowned. "The killer left you a note?"

Reid thought for a moment and shrugged. "Could be a weird coincidence." Maybe she shared the surname of the note's intended recipient. Seemed unlikely. But the alternative was even more strange. Why would the killer leave a note for her? And how'd he know she'd be the detective working this case? She was assuming the killer was male. Statistically speaking, chances favored a man.

She caught Beatrice's eye. If there was ever a time when she needed to ask questions, this was it. But her hands were effectively tied at the moment.

Beatrice had said the note was for her. Spirits always spoke the truth. At least, that had been her experience to date. Instinct told her Beatrice was no different from the countless other spirits who'd found her in their time of need.

Careful not to disturb anything, Reid and London toured the remaining rooms of the house but found nothing of interest. They stepped down from the porch and onto the sidewalk as Forensics arrived.

Reid slipped out of the Tyvek suit and, in a replay of her earlier movements, leaned against her car to remove the booties.

“Already been inside?” Cabrera asked, suiting up.

Reid nodded. “Heads.” She tossed him the key, which he deftly grabbed in the air. “Vic was killed on the porch. There’s a note on the kitchen counter.” She doubted they’d find any prints. The killer seemed too meticulous.

Cabrera nodded. “Mug with you today?”

Mug barked from the car at the mention of his name.

Cabrera reached inside the van and withdrew a can of tennis balls. There was a small red bow stuck to the can’s lid. “Congrats on the win,” he said, tossing it to her. Everyone knew about Mug’s addiction. “And sorry about your captain.”

“Thanks. Have you met Detective Gold?” she asked in an effort to change the subject.

“Sylver and Gold?” Laughing, Cabrera stepped forward and extended a hand to London. “Never known you to take on a partner, Sylver.”

“We’re not partners.” London corrected him. “She’s training me.”

Cabrera raised an eyebrow. “Never known you to take on a rookie, either.”

“Boyle’s just flexing his muscles,” she said. “Let me know if you find anything.”

“Will do.” He shut the van door and started toward the house.

## Chapter Six

Seated in the car once again, London decided riding in the back had its perks. Sure, it was uncomfortable and a little humbling to be taking a back seat—literally—to a dog. But, back here, she could gaze at Reid’s profile without being noticed. She’d never had the chance to study her up close.

Reid was stunning from every angle. The raven hair that she kept almost as short as a military crewcut only enhanced her beauty. Without a drop of makeup and exhibiting zero effort in the fashion department, it was clear that Reid put very little time, effort, or thought into her appearance. London doubted Reid was even aware of just how beautiful she was. Her bold confidence and take-it-or-leave-it attitude made everyone around her accept her for who she was. She had clearly worked hard to make a name for herself and was readily respected by colleagues.

London took a deep breath and realized her crush was getting the best of her. Even Reid’s brashness somehow added to her appeal. But there was something deeper in Reid that drew her attention—something she hadn’t noticed before now. Pain.

There was a distinct vulnerability in Reid that lay, at least partially concealed, underneath her thorny attitude. It was well camouflaged but definitely there. London couldn’t help but wonder what it was.

The note inside the victim’s house sprang to mind. If, indeed, the note had been meant for Reid—as London suspected it was—she wondered what the secret was. Could that secret somehow be connected to the pain she sensed in Reid?

She cleared her throat, surprised Reid hadn’t resorted to blasting the radio the moment she’d started the car. Perhaps no radio was an invitation to talk. “What did you win?”

“Huh?” Reid asked, clearly jolted from her thoughts.

“Cabrera congratulated you.”

Reid gazed proudly at the dog beside her. “Mug here won first place.”

“In what?”

“Ugliest Dog.”

She laughed, waiting for the real answer. None came. “Oh.”

“I always say, if you’ve got something unique going for you, own it and be good at it.”

Reid reached over to pat Mug on the back. “Just so happens he’s really good at being ugly.”

London couldn’t help but smile. Now their matching sweatshirts made sense. The love Reid had for Mug was clear. There was a soft side to this detective, after all.

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“Where to now?” London asked from the back seat.

“Back to the precinct to get your coat.”

“We’ve been over this. I am *not* going inside without—”

“Mug and I will escort you inside, Your Highness.” This time, she didn’t have anything up her sleeve. It was simply too cold outside to make the rookie traipse around in a blazer. London’s periodic shivering was starting to make her feel guilty.

“Then what?” London persisted.

“We’ll return to canvass the neighborhood. See if anyone saw or heard anything on Saturday night.”

“Why Saturday?”

“Because that’s when our vic was murdered.”

“ME’s report came back?” London met her gaze in the rearview mirror. “Already?”

Damn. She’d slipped. Again. “Hasn’t come back yet, no,” she replied nonchalantly.

“Then how do you know she was murdered Saturday night?”

Reid shrugged. “Educated guess.” Keeping up with London’s questions and covering her tracks while working the case was proving near impossible.

“Let me guess. When you’ve been doing this as long as you have, you get pretty good at these things.”

Reid sighed, grateful for the save. She couldn’t stop thinking about the note in Beatrice’s house. It was taunting her now. The only thing she kept secret was her ability to talk to the dead. And there were only two people in the world she’d ever confided in: her grandmother and the captain, both of whom were now dead.

She pulled into the BPD’s parking lot, climbed out of the car, and led the way upstairs with Mug at her side and London behind her. She took a seat at her desk and picked up the phone, intent on calling the ME for an update.

London stood beside the desk and held out her hand.

“You hoping for a tip?”

“Keys.”

“To what?” she asked, balancing the phone on one shoulder.

“The car. What else?”

“No. Keys stay with me.”

“Fine. Then I get the dog.”

“Over my dead body.”

“Come on, Sylver.” London sighed impatiently. “I have to use the bathroom.”

“And you need my dog to help you?”

“I need something for insurance.”

She replaced the phone on its cradle, annoyed beyond measure at these constant interruptions. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Insurance,” London repeated. “So you won’t bail on me again.”

It’d be a miracle if she got through the rest of this shift without losing her temper.

Fuming, she opened her desk drawer, stood, and handed over the keys.

“Nice try. But these aren’t them,” London said without even looking down.

“How the hell do you know that?”

“I saw you put them in your pocket.”

“Shit.” She felt herself soften a little. “You might be in the right line of work, after all.”

London took Reid’s hand and placed the imposters firmly in her palm. They locked eyes the moment their hands connected. “Thanks. I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Reid drew in a breath, surprised by the sudden chemistry between them. Not only was London not backing down, this rookie was holding her own. She found that incredibly alluring.

She was close enough now to notice how good London smelled. Her blond hair looked silky-soft. Large brown eyes were intelligent and probing. There was a fresh-faced beauty about her. In that moment, Reid knew she was in trouble. She withdrew her hand and took a step back, her gaze still on London’s.

“Right pocket,” London prompted, breaking the moment. “Hand them over so I can pee.”

“Fine. Here.” She dug into her pocket, sat back down, and set the keys on the corner of the desk to avoid further physical contact. Watching London walk away, she didn’t have the

heart to tell her that she had a spare set. Every good cop did.

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Back in the car and alone for the first time all day—finally—Reid took a deep breath, started the ignition, and peeled out of the parking lot. She started toward Beatrice's neighborhood and had driven for about five minutes before her conscience kicked in. Cursing, she pulled to the side of the road.

She wanted nothing more than to lose the new baggage that had been forced upon her, but she just couldn't bring herself to do it. *Shit*. She beat the steering wheel and cursed aloud as Mug peered at her quizzically.

Since her transfer to Homicide, knowing her secret could be uncovered at any moment by a nosy reporter, colleague, or boss, she'd kept early retirement in her back pocket. Her plan B was to start her own private-eye business. Was it finally time to put in her papers?

Mentoring London meant she'd have to find a way to solve cases without revealing her secret. Limiting her conversations with the dead and keeping her secret under wraps would likely more than double her workload.

Even with her best efforts, there was always the risk she'd be discovered. If anyone could figure out her secret, it was London. The one thing Reid had in her favor was London didn't believe in that stuff. She'd said as much when Reid deflected the rookie's suspicion by asking if *she* was psychic.

Reid shook her head as she slowly came to terms with this new arrangement. Looked like her days of solitude were over, at least for the next six months. Boyle had better not saddle her

with anyone else after that.

Her mind made up, she put her blinker on, swung a U-turn, and returned to the precinct.

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London couldn't believe it. Reid had left her. *Again*. She set her hands on her hips and took one last look at where the black Camaro should have been parked.

Had Reid given her the keys to another car? She fished them out of her coat pocket to take a closer look. These were Reid's car keys all right. She was sure of it. The slippery detective must have had a spare set.

She shook her head, remembering when their hands had touched upstairs as she'd pressed another set of keys into Reid's palm. Something had changed between them in that moment. Something had ignited. She'd felt it with every cell in her body. Reid was attracted to her. *That's* why Reid had fled.

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"Have you seen the rookie?" Reid asked as Garcia rounded the corner with his daily hot dog from the cart across the street. London was nowhere to be found.

"Yup."

"Well?" she asked. "Where is she?"

"What's in it for me?"

Sighing, she cast a glance at Boyle sitting behind his desk on the phone. She couldn't let

on that she'd lost the rookie on day one. "Tomorrow's hot dog—my treat."

Garcia sat down, propped his feet up on his desk, and casually took a bite. "Let's see. One hot dog in exchange for saving your ass with our new lieutenant." He shook his head and looked up at her. "No deal."

"Fine. Two hot dogs. Final offer."

He took another bite and proceeded to answer around a mouthful of hot dog, "I'm thinking more along the lines of a month's worth ought to do it."

She set her hand over the Glock at her hip and unsnapped the holster.

Garcia's eyes grew wide. "Two hot dogs it is. A very generous offer."

Reid snapped the holster shut and let her hand fall away. "So?"

"She took off a few minutes ago." He threw a glance at Mug. "Said the car wasn't big enough for the three of you."

"Where the hell is she now?"

"Up your ass, picking daisies. How the hell should I know?"

Hoping to find London waiting near the car as she had earlier, Reid returned to the parking lot. No luck. The rookie had mysteriously vanished.

Had she driven London off after less than a day on the job? Instinct told her the rookie had more tenacity than that. She'd turn up. Eventually.

Well, rookie or no rookie, Reid had a case to solve. She glanced at Mug. "The crime-fighting duo is back in business," she said, leaning down to give him a high five. She held the car door open for him and then settled behind the steering wheel, determined never to take her solitude for granted ever again.

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Reid parked, curbside, across the street from Beatrice's house. Forensics was still inside. She climbed out of the car, and Mug followed suit behind her. She surveyed the surrounding houses as he sniffed at some brown grass on the sidewalk.

This was an upper-middle-class neighborhood. Some of these residents were bound to have security systems with video cameras. Maybe she'd get lucky and find a recording of the suspect loading Beatrice's body into a car.

As if on cue, Beatrice appeared. *Where have you been?* she asked.

"Working your case," Reid answered.

*Have you caught him yet?*

"No, but it's still early." She looked around to make sure no one was watching her have a seemingly one-sided conversation. "Do you know any of your neighbors on this street?"

*All of them, dear. Why?*

"Do you know if any of your neighbors have security cameras?"

Beatrice pointed to the house directly across from hers. *That's Paul and Marge's house. When Paul died a few months back, Marge had a security system installed. It's quite state-of-the-art.*

Mug finished his business and accompanied her to Marge's front stoop. Reid rang the doorbell. She knocked loudly, without waiting. Since London's whereabouts were still unknown, she was feeling a wee bit impatient.

An older woman—presumably Marge—opened the door and scowled at Reid. She held out a tiny biscuit for Mug. He gingerly plucked it from her grasp. "You must be Detective

Sylver,” she said, still scowling. She set a hand on her hip and opened the door wider to reveal the missing rookie. “Detective Gold here was just telling me how you mistakenly left her behind at the police station.”

With a glass of milk in one hand and a cookie in the other, the rookie looked right at home.

“You two know each other?” Reid asked.

“We do now,” Marge replied. Her expression softened as she gazed adoringly at London.

What was it with London and little old ladies?

“You wait right here, honey,” Marge said, withdrawing farther into the house. “I’ll wrap up your cookies so you can take them with you.”

“Mrs. Rutgers, you don’t have to do that.”

“Nonsense. It’ll take but a minute. Be back in a jiff.”

London’s smile vanished as she met Reid’s gaze and joined her on the stoop. Mug greeted her with a quick lick to her hand. His scarred, furless tail wagged exuberantly.

They stood, side by side, in awkward silence. Reid couldn’t stand it anymore. “How’d you get here?” she finally asked.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“What, are we in fifth grade, and you’re mad, so you’re pitting an old lady against me?”

“I can’t help it if she likes me. That’s usually what happens when you’re a courteous human being. With *manners*.” She crossed her arms. “You might want to try it sometime.”

Touché.

Marge returned with a giant baggie of oatmeal cookies. Smiling, she handed them to London. “Let me know if there’s anything more I can do to help.”

“We’ll be in touch. Thanks for your time, Mrs. Rugers.”

Reid eyed the baggie with envy. Oatmeal cookies were her favorite. She’d skipped lunch and was starving. “Do I get cookies, too?”

With one last disapproving glare, Marge slammed the door in her face.

“Guess that’s a no?” Reid called out.

London turned, jogged down the steps, and hurried along the sidewalk.