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You Belong to Me

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Prologue

Bayview, Delaware, Sunday, March 7, 11.15 A.M.

‘Excuse me, sir, you can’t go up there.’

Malcolm Edwards ignored the marina manager’s deep voice, his eyes fixed on his destination, his weakened body already aching. The *Carrie On* beckoned, rocking as the Chesapeake Bay churned. A storm was coming. It was a perfect day to die.

Just a few more steps, then I can rest. Then the dock began to rumble beneath his feet as Daryl charged up from behind.

‘Hey! Stop right there. This is private property. Hey, buddy! I said—’

Malcolm winced as a beefy hand grabbed his upper arm and spun him around. For a moment he looked into Daryl’s face, waiting silently as recognition flickered and the man’s mouth dropped open in shock.

‘Mr Edwards.’ Daryl took a step back, his ruddy cheeks gone pale. ‘I’m sorry, sir.’

‘It’s all right,’ Malcolm said gently. ‘I know I don’t look like myself.’

He knew what he looked like. He was surprised Daryl had recognized him at all, despite the years they’d known each other. Malcolm doubted many of his so-called friends would recognize him, not that they’d given themselves the opportunity. Only Carrie had stood by him, and there were times Malcolm wished she had not. In sickness and in health. This was definitely the former.

She thought he couldn’t hear her sobs in the shower, but he did. He’d give all he owned not to put her through such hell. But man

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didn't get to make those calls. That was God's territory. Carrie had cursed God as she'd watched Malcolm waste away, but Malcolm didn't have that luxury. He already had enough black marks on his soul.

Daryl swallowed hard. 'Can I get you anything? Help you in any way?'

'No. I'll be fine. I'm going fishing.' He held up a bucket of bait he'd bought for appearances. 'I just want to feel the wind in my face.' *One last time*, he added to himself. He turned toward his boat, determinedly putting one foot in front of the other. The dock rumbled again as Daryl walked beside him, clearly hesitant to speak his mind.

'Sir, there's a squall comin' in. Maybe you should wait.'

'I don't have time to wait.' Truer words were never spoken.

Daryl winced. 'I can get a crew to take you out. My grandson is a fine sailor.'

'I appreciate it, I truly do, but sometimes a man just wants to be alone. You take care, and thank you.' He made it on board, his body sagging as his hands closed over the wheel. It had been far too long since he'd spent a day on the Bay. But he'd been busy. There'd been doctors and treatments and . . . He looked up at the forbidding sky.

And making things right. He'd had too many things to make right, especially the one thing that had burdened his mind for twenty-one years.

He thought about the letter he'd sent and hoped it wasn't too late. He hoped he could handle the wheel long enough to get far enough out to do what needed to be done. He hoped drowning really was just like going to sleep.

The water grew choppy, the wind more brutal the farther out he got. Finally he killed the throttle and listened to the waves, his eyes closed. He drew the salty air deep into his lungs, savoring this, his final day. Carrie would be sad, but part of her would be relieved. She'd put on a brave face that morning when he kissed her goodbye. He'd told her he was going fishing after his doctor's appointment. When the authorities knocked on her door to give her the bad news,

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she'd swear that her husband could never have taken his own life, but deep down she'd know the truth.

He stepped onto the deck, setting up his fishing poles. There were appearances to be kept up in case someone found his boat intact after he was 'swept overboard' by a rogue wave. He was baiting a hook when a harsh voice broke into his thoughts.

'Who are the others?'

Malcolm spun around, the bait sliding through his fingers. A man stood a yard behind him, feet planted firmly, arms crossed over his chest. There was hate in his narrowed eyes and Malcolm felt fear shiver down his spine. 'Who are you?'

The man took a steady step forward despite the rocking. 'Who are the others?'

The others. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he lied.

The man pulled a letter from his pocket and Malcolm's stomach roiled, recognizing both the letter and the handwriting as his own. Malcolm thought back twenty-one years and thought he knew who the man was. He definitely knew what the man wanted.

'Who are the others?' the man asked once again, carefully spacing each word.

Malcolm shook his head. 'No. I'm not going to tell you.'

The man reached into his other pocket and pulled out a long filleting knife. He held it up, examining the sharp edge. 'I'll kill you,' he said, with little emotion.

'I don't care. I'm going to die anyway. Or had you not noticed?'

The boat pitched and Malcolm stumbled, but the man stood firm. *He's got sea legs.* If he was who Malcolm thought he was, that made sense. The man's father had been a fisherman back then.

In the years since, businesses had been lost, lives splintered. Ruined. *Because of what we did. What I did. He'll kill me. And I'd deserve it.* But he had no intention of divulging the others' identities, nor a wish to die horribly. He lunged toward the side.

But the man was fast, grabbing Malcolm's arm and shoving him into a deckchair, binding his hands and feet with a length of twine he pulled from his back pocket. He'd come prepared.

I'm going to die.

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The man rose, threateningly. 'Who are the others?'

His heart pounding, Malcolm stared up at the man he'd wronged. And said nothing.

The man shrugged. 'You'll tell. If I had more time, I'd do everything to you that you did to her.' He met Malcolm's eyes. 'Everything.'

Malcolm swallowed as he remembered everything that had been done that night, so long ago. 'I'm sorry. I said I was sorry. But *I* didn't do anything to her. I swear it.'

'Yeah,' the man said bitterly. 'I got that from your letter. And when you finally confessed, you were too much of a coward to sign your name.'

It was true. He'd been a coward then, and now. 'How did you know it was me?'

'I figured it was one of you. You all ran together then. You all signed that team picture.'

Malcolm closed his eyes, seeing it. They'd been young and so damn arrogant. They thought they had the world by the tail. 'The one in the trophy case at the high school.'

He sneered. 'The very one. Your handwriting hasn't changed much in twenty-one years. You still make your M's the same way. It didn't take a genius to track that letter to you. Which brings me back to the reason for my dropping by. You will tell me what I want to know.'

'I won't. Like I said in the letter, that's between them and God. So no. I'm sorry.'

The man's sneer became a sinister smile. 'We'll see about that.'

He disappeared below deck, and Malcolm pulled at his bonds, knowing it was futile. His mind was flashing pictures, all the sick, disgusting things that had been done to the girl that night so long ago, as he'd stood and watched. And done nothing.

I should have done something. I should have made it stop. But he had not, and neither had the others. Now he'd pay the price. *Finally.*

He heard the thumping of something being dragged up from the hold. It was a woman. Malcolm's gut turned to water. She was wearing a sweater exactly like the one he'd committed to memory

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just hours ago. When he'd kissed his wife goodbye.

'Carrie.' Malcolm tried to stand, but could not. She'd been bound, blindfolded and gagged, and the man was dragging her by her arm. 'Let her go. She did nothing.'

'Neither did you,' he said mockingly. 'You said so yourself.' He shoved Carrie into a chair and held the knife to her throat. 'Now tell me, Malcolm. Who. Are. The. Others?'

Desperately Malcolm glanced at the man's narrowed eyes before returning his own to the knife at his wife's neck. He couldn't breathe. Couldn't think. 'I don't remember.'

A drop of blood ran down Carrie's throat as the knife nicked. 'Don't you dare lie to me,' the man said quietly. 'If you know who I am, you know I have nothing to lose.'

Malcolm closed his eyes. He couldn't think when he was looking at her. He was too scared. 'Okay. But take her back to shore, first. Otherwise, I won't tell you.'

Carrie's scream of pain was muffled by the gag in her mouth. Malcolm's eyes opened and he stared, horrified. Then he retched, violently. He couldn't look back, couldn't look at the finger the man held out for his inspection.

Severed. *He'd cut off her finger.* 'I'll tell you,' he rasped. 'Dammit, I'll tell you.'

'I thought you might.' The man stepped away from Carrie and she tucked herself into as small a space as her bonds would allow, whimpering. From his front pocket the man pulled a notepad and pen. 'I'm ready when you are.'

Quickly Malcolm spat the names, hating himself for it. For all of it. For staying that night, for watching. For writing the letter and endangering his wife. The man showed no emotion as he wrote the names, then pocketed his notepad.

'I've told you,' Malcolm said, his voice cracking. 'Now take her back. Let me get her a doctor. Please, put her finger in some ice. Please. I beg you.'

The man studied the knife, red with Carrie's blood. 'Did she say that?'

'Who?'

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The man's jaw cocked. 'My *sister*. Did she beg?' He grabbed Carrie's hair and yanked her head back. He held the knife to her exposed throat. 'Did she?'

'Yes.' Malcolm's body shook with sobs. 'Please. I'm begging you. My wife did nothing. Please. I gave you what you wanted. Please don't hurt her any more.'

The man's arm jerked, the knife sliced, and Malcolm screamed as blood spurted from her body. *No. No. No. Please God, no.* She was dead. Carrie was dead.

Callously, the man cut through the twine with which he'd bound her and her body landed at Malcolm's feet. 'I should leave you here to watch the birds eat her flesh,' the man muttered. 'But someone might find you before you died, then you'd tell on me. I could cut your tongue out, but you'd still find a way to tell. So you have to die too.' He lifted Malcolm's chin, forcing him to look up. 'I'll cut your tongue out anyway. Any last words?'

Standing naked on deck, he watched as the last of his clothes sank below the gray water, following the path Malcolm and his wife had taken. They'd be chum by nightfall.

The worst of the storm had passed as he'd dealt with the disposal of the bodies. There had been a lot of blood. Luckily he'd brought a change of clothes. He'd shower off the Edwards' blood before sailing the *Carrie On* to a private marina whose owner would be asking no questions. There he could hose the blood off the deck and remove any markers identifying the boat as Malcolm Edwards'.

Going below, he paused at the galley counter, where he'd put the notepad for safekeeping. He couldn't risk getting it covered in blood. Not like he needed the list anyway. The names were already etched in his mind.

Some he'd expected. A few were surprises.

All would wish they'd done the right thing twenty-one years ago.

Chapter One

Baltimore, Maryland, Monday, May 3, 5.35 A.M.

Z Top growling in her ears, Lucy Trask sang along as she jogged the path that cut through the park behind her apartment, not caring that she was hopelessly off key. Gwyn was their singer, after all. Nobody cared what Lucy's voice sounded like, only how her bow sang. Besides, nobody was around to hear her this morning except other runners, and they had earphones just like she did.

This time of the morning there was no one she needed to impress, nobody whose opinion she needed to worry about. It was one of the many reasons she loved the hour before dawn.

She rounded the curve at the end of the path and slowed to a stop, her serenity suddenly gone. 'Oh no,' she murmured sadly. 'Not again.' It was Mr Pugh, sitting at one of the chess tables, his tweed hat illuminated by the street lamp behind him.

She detoured off the path, jogging to the green where her old friend had spent so many hours checkmating all challengers. Those days were long gone. Now he sat alone in the night, his head down, the collar of his coat pulled up around his face.

She sighed. He'd wandered out of his apartment, again. She slowed her pace as she drew close, approaching quietly. 'Mr Pugh?' She touched his shoulder gently, taking care not to startle him. He didn't like to be startled. 'It's time to go home.'

Then she frowned. Normally he'd look up, that lost expression in his eyes, and she'd take him back to Barb who was so weary from caring for him all the time. Tonight he didn't look up. He was still. So very still. Her heart sank. *Oh no. No, no, no.*

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She reached to press her fingers to his neck, then covered her mouth to muffle a scream when his body slumped over the table, his hat tumbling off his head. For a moment she could only stare in horror. His head was misshapen, caked with dried blood. And his face . . . She stumbled backward. Bile burned her throat.

Oh God. Oh God. His face was gone. So were his eyes.

She took another step back, blindly. 'No.' She vaguely heard a whimper, realized it was her own. Her breath hitched in her lungs and she forced herself to breathe.

Do something. Her hands shaking, she found her cell in the pocket of her shorts and managed to dial 911, flinching when a crisp voice answered.

'This is 911. What is the nature of your emergency?'

'This is . . .' Lucy's voice broke as she stared at the remains. She closed her eyes. *Not remains. It's Mr Pugh. Somebody killed him. Oh God. Oh God.*

'This is . . .' She couldn't speak. Couldn't breathe.

'Miss?' the operator repeated urgently. 'What is the nature of your emergency?'

Sternly Lucy cleared her throat. Called on years of training. Forced her voice to steady. 'This is Dr Trask from the Medical Examiner's office. I need to report a murder.'

Monday, May 3, 6.00 A.M.

Detective JD Fitzpatrick studied the small crowd gathered behind the yellow tape. Neighbors, he thought. Some still wore bathrobes and slippers. Some were old, some middle-aged. Some cried. Some swore. Some did both.

He ventured close enough to listen in as he approached the crime scene. This was the time to listen, when shock had their tongues loose.

'What kind of animal could do that to a helpless old man?' one of the younger women was demanding furiously, her hands clenched into fists.

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'He never hurt anyone,' the man next to her said in a bewildered tone.

'Goddam gangs,' an old man muttered to no one at all. 'Not safe to leave your house any more.'

JD noted the well-maintained grass of the small community park. There was no evidence of gang presence here, but he'd seen it clearly enough on the drive in. This had been a pocket of safety for these residents. A sanctuary that the ugliness outside hadn't yet touched. An illusion, he knew. Ugliness was everywhere.

Now the dead man's neighbors knew it too. It didn't take a gang to do a murder. One perp was enough, especially if the victim was elderly and vulnerable.

'This is going to kill Barb,' an old woman cried brokenly, leaning against another old man. 'How many times did I tell her to put him in a home? How many times?'

'I know, honey,' the man murmured. He cradled her gray head against his shoulder, shielding her eyes from the scene. 'At least Lucy's here.'

The old woman nodded, sniffing. 'She'll know what to do.'

Barb was probably the wife or daughter of the dead man, but JD wondered who Lucy was and what it was that she'd know to do.

Two uniformed officers stood inside the yellow crime-scene tape, shoulder to shoulder. One faced the neighbors, the other the crime scene. Together they were a barrier, blocking the view of the victim as best they could.

CSU was already here, snapping photographs and processing the scene. Between the cops and CSU, nobody in the waiting crowd could see much of anything now, but JD knew that many of them had seen enough before the scene had been secured.

The two uniforms pointed to a third cop standing next to Drew Peterson, the leader of the CSU team. The cop was Hopper, JD was informed. The first responder.

'Thanks.' JD stepped around the two uniforms, steeled for what he'd see. Still he fought a grimace. The victim sat in a chair fixed to the pavement, his body sprawled over a park chess table, his head

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and face beaten so severely that he was unrecognizable. *Who would do that to an old man? Why?*

The victim wore a beige trench coat, buttoned to his neck, belted around the waist. His hands were shoved in his pockets. There didn't appear to be any blood on his coat or around the chair. The only blood visible was dried on the victim's face and scalp.

Officer Hopper approached, a grim determination in his steps. 'I'm Hopper.'

'Fitzpatrick, Homicide.' After three weeks on the unit, the words still felt strange in JD's mouth. 'You were first on?' he asked and the officer nodded.

'This is my beat. The victim is Jerry Pugh. Sixty-eight year old Caucasian male.'

'So you knew him. I'm sorry,' JD murmured.

Hopper nodded again. 'Me too. Jerry was harmless. Sick.'

'He had dementia?' JD asked and Hopper's eyes narrowed in surprise.

'Yes. How did you know?'

'The lady on the front row said she told Barb to put him in a home.'

'That's Mrs Korbel. And I imagine she did. So did I. But Mrs Pugh – that's Barb – wouldn't do it. Couldn't do it, I guess. They'd been married forever.'

'Who found the body?'

Again Hopper looked surprised. 'She did.' He pointed to the other side of the crime scene where a woman stood alone, watching. She stood with her arms crossed over her chest, her expression unreadable. But there was a fragility to her, a palpable tension, as if she was barely holding on.

She was tall, five nine or ten. The long hair she'd pulled back in a simple ponytail was a reddish gold that flickered under the bright CSU lights, like little licks of fire. She was very pretty, her features so classically fine that her face could have graced a statue. Or perhaps it was because she stood so motionlessly that he thought so.

She wore a windbreaker, running shorts and a pair of hi-tech running shoes. That she'd been allowed proximity to the scene

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suggested she was more than a simple bystander, but he'd never seen her before. That face he'd remember.

Those legs he'd certainly remember.

'Who is—?' he started to ask, then she turned and met his eyes.

And in a flash of painful memory, JD knew exactly who she was. 'Dr Trask,' he said quietly. Lucy Trask, the ME. *Lucy will know what to do.* 'She found him?'

'Just before dawn,' Hopper said. 'The doc . . . well, she's a nice lady, that's all.'

JD found he had to clear his throat. 'I know. Where is Mrs Pugh?'

'My partner Rico went to find her. He got no answer when he knocked on their apartment door. The super was waiting with the key. By then the whole building was out here. Everybody but Mrs Pugh. Rico searched the apartment, but no sign of the missus. Her car's not in the parking lot.'

'No sign of foul play in the apartment?'

'No. Rico says it looks like she left. There were a couple extra bowls of cat food on the kitchen floor, and all the kitchen appliances were unplugged. The super's getting emergency contact info off the rental agreement now.'

JD had been listening to Hopper, but hadn't taken his gaze off Dr Lucy Trask. She'd looked away, but not before he'd seen the devastated grief in her eyes.

He looked back at Hopper. 'Get Rico on the radio. Tell him not to call the emergency contact. Give the info to me. I don't want anyone else informing the wife.'

Hopper frowned. 'Barb Pugh isn't involved. She's almost seventy.'

'I hear you.' It was unlikely that an old woman could produce that kind of damage. 'But I have to proceed like she is involved until I know differently.'

Hopper's frown lessened slightly. 'All right. I'll get Rico on the radio.'

'Thank you.' JD crouched next to the victim, studying him up close. Someone had done a real job on Mr Jerry Pugh. The weapon used had been blunt and hard. The attack had been relentless. Every

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feature of the man's face had been crushed.

Rage, he thought. Or maybe a drug-induced frenzy. He'd certainly seen enough of that in Narcotics. This was no garden-variety mugging. Someone had totally lost it.

CSU's Drew Peterson crouched beside him. 'Hey, JD. You got here fast. You finally sell your place way out in the burbs?'

JD and Drew had been assigned to the same precinct right out of the Academy, but they hadn't seen much of each other since Maya died. JD hadn't seen much of anyone since then. His assignment in the Narcotics division had mercifully swallowed him up. But this move to Homicide was a clean break. A fresh start. And as much as he pitied the poor old man slumped over the chess table, JD was looking forward to the change.

'Not even a nibble.' After a frustrating year on the market, JD was about to give up trying to sell the house he'd once shared with his wife. 'You find anything?'

'Not a lot so far. We just finished taking pictures. The ME has to do their thing, then we'll get started. Where's Stevie?'

'On her way.' As soon as she lined up someone to watch her little girl. JD's partner Stevie Mazzetti normally had all her bases covered when they were on call, but her childcare backups had backfired today. He didn't mind covering for Stevie. Her need for being covered was rare. She was a good cop. And JD owed her a lot.

JD pointed to the grass around the chess table. 'He wasn't killed here. No blood on the grass or on the beige overcoat. Any idea how he got here?'

'My best guess, by wheelchair. I found tracks in the grass. We'll take impressions if we can. Chair's gone, though. Whoever dumped him here took it with them.'

'No tire tracks from the path to this table,' JD said. 'He was dragged or carried, which would have left somebody pushing an empty wheelchair from the scene. If he was dragged, he might have grass on his shoes.'

'If he does, it's stuck to the soles. Did you see his shoes?' Drew asked.

JD leaned to see beneath the chess table. The victim's wingtips

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were new and had been shined recently. 'No scuffing. Doesn't look like he was dragged.'

'Do you know how much those shoes cost?'

'A lot.' The shoes appeared to be very expensive. Maybe even custom-made. JD looked over his shoulder at the apartment building. It wasn't low-rent, but it certainly wasn't the Ritz. 'I guess what he saved on rent, he spent on shoes. I wonder what Mr Pugh did for a living, before the dementia.'

'The doc will know,' Drew said. 'She lives in the building too.'

'She knew him personally?' he asked, and Drew nodded again. That explained both her grief and why she was running here, in this particular park. She still stood motionless, staring at the body, and sympathy tugged at his heart. 'That had to have been a huge shock. She's not going to do the exam, is she?'

'No. She called for techs and a rig. She appears to be holding it together.'

'But not by much,' JD murmured. 'I'm going to interview Dr Trask, then see if we can find the vic's wife and any witnesses. Call me over if you find something.'

'Will do.'

Lucy Trask straightened when she saw him coming. Her eyes were dry, but her face was very pale. She fixed her gaze on the dead man in the chair, not glancing up.

'Dr Trask? I'm Detective Fitzpatrick.'

'I know,' she said tonelessly. 'You're Mazzetti's new partner. Where is Stevie?'

'On her way. Can I ask you a few questions?'

'Of course.' She spoke, but her lips barely moved.

'Why don't we go sit in my car? You'll be more comfortable there.'

Her jaw tightened. 'No. I'll stay here. Please, just ask your questions, Detective.'

There was a thread of desperate fury in her voice. She had the smallest trace of an accent. It wasn't quite Southern, but she wasn't from the city. At least not originally. 'Okay. You knew the victim?'

She jerked a nod, but said nothing.

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'I'm sorry, Dr Trask. I know this is beyond difficult. You found him?' he asked and she nodded again. 'When?'

'At about five thirty. I was running. I saw Mr Pugh in his chair.' She recited the words, as if giving a report. 'I thought he'd wandered away from his apartment again.'

'Because he had dementia,' JD said and her glance swung up to his. Her eyes were a clear, piercing blue, not easily forgotten. At the moment they churned turbulently with grief and anger and shock, but he knew they were capable of great warmth and compassion. He'd remembered her eyes for a long time after the day he'd first seen her. The only time he'd seen her.

And he'd only seen her eyes. The rest of her had been masked and gowned. He hadn't seen her face, but he'd never forgotten her eyes.

'Mr Pugh had Alzheimer's disease,' she confirmed.

'How often did he wander away from home?'

Her shoulders sagged wearily. 'Recently, three or four times a week. Barb has to sleep sometime. When he wandered off at night, I was usually the one to find him.'

'And you would take him home?'

'Yes.' She said it so quietly he barely heard the word.

'He would go willingly with you?'

'Yes. He wasn't violent.'

'Some Alzheimer's patients are,' JD noted.

Her chin lifted a fraction. 'Some are. He wasn't. We were able to calm him.'

She had more than known the victim, JD realized. They'd been close. 'You were out early this morning.'

'Yes. I always run before dawn.'

'Did you see the victim sitting there when you started your run?'

She looked angry. 'No. If I had, I would have taken him home right then.'

'So he wasn't there when you started your run?'

Her eyes flickered, as if now understanding his question. 'Oh. No. He might have been, but I wouldn't have seen him. I start from the other side of the building and run the perimeter of the neighborhood before cutting back through the park on my way back.'

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'Did you see anyone else?'

'Only the other runners. I don't know any of their names. Officer Hopper might.' She looked toward her building. 'Where is Officer Rico? He went to check on Barb.'

'It looks like she's gone.'

Trask's gaze shot up to him, wild panic in her eyes this time. One slender hand grabbed his arm in a vise-like grip. 'Gone where? Gone dead?' she demanded and he immediately regretted the words he'd chosen.

'No, no,' he soothed, covering her hand with his. Her skin was like ice. He pulled her fingers from his sleeve and sandwiched her hand between his palms, rubbing them to warm her. 'It appears she left. The apartment is empty and her car isn't in the lot.'

Panic became disbelief and she stood there, her hand motionless between his. 'No. Barb would never leave him alone like that.'

'But she is gone.'

Jerking her hand free, she took a step back, the remaining color draining from her face. 'No. Absolutely not. She would not leave him of her own free will. Somebody must have taken her. Oh my God.'

'She unplugged all the kitchen appliances,' JD said and watched as his words penetrated her disbelief. 'Did she do that when she traveled?'

Trask nodded, numbly. 'Yes. But I won't believe she left him alone. She was devoted to him.'

'Sometimes people under stress do things they wouldn't normally do,' JD said carefully. 'Caring for a spouse with Alz—'

'No,' she interrupted, fury giving her voice authority. 'No. For God's sake, Detective, Mr Pugh couldn't even dress himself. He couldn't even tie his...'. She faltered suddenly, her brows furrowing.

JD leaned in closer when she didn't finish the sentence. 'Tie his what?'

But she was already moving toward the body. 'His shoes,' she said over her shoulder. 'He's wearing shoes with laces.'

JD hurried after her, ready to pull her back if she got too close, but she stopped, crouching where he had minutes before. Something had

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clicked and she was no longer numb. Now there was an energy around her. The air all but hummed.

Fascinated, he crouched beside her, staring at her profile as she stared at the victim's feet. Color had returned to her face, her cheeks pinking up before his eyes.

No, he could never have forgotten her face.

'Mr Pugh hasn't worn regular shoes in five years,' she murmured, dragging his attention back to the dead man in the chair. 'He wears an orthopedic shoe with Velcro. Barb's fingers were too stiff to tie his laces.'

'Maybe he had two pairs,' JD said, but she shook her head.

'These are Ferragamos. Mr Pugh never had that kind of money, and if he had, he wouldn't have spent it on shoes.'

'What did he do for a living? I mean . . . before the Alzheimer's?'

She glanced up at him, her eyes sharp. Alert. And relieved. 'He was a high-school music teacher who bought his shoes from J.C. Penney's. This is not Jerry Pugh.'

She sounded utterly certain. 'What makes you so sure?' he asked.

'These shoes are the wrong size,' she said. 'These are size ten. Mr Pugh wore size twelve.' She closed her eyes, pursing lips that trembled. 'Oh God. Oh God. Wears. Wears a size twelve. He's still alive. This isn't him. *This isn't him.*'

'Are you all right, Dr Trask?'

She nodded, trembling, her hands clenched into fists. 'I'm fine.'

He wasn't sure about that, but hoped she'd know if she were about to faint. 'How do you know Mr Pugh's shoe size?' he asked, unconvinced.

'I see a lot of feet in my business, Detective. I know my sizes.'

He pictured the bodies in the cold room at the morgue, with just their feet sticking from beneath the sheet, tags on the toes. 'I guess you do. But how do you know *his*?'

She moved her shoulders a little uncomfortably as she stared at the victim's battered face. 'In February I found Mr Pugh sitting right here, in his chair. He'd left the house without his shoes and his feet were almost frozen. I called 911, massaged his feet and covered them with my coat. I know what size his feet are. This

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man's are too small. This man is not Mr Pugh.'

'That was very kind of you, massaging the feet of an old man,' he murmured.

'It was what anyone would have done.'

He doubted that. 'You call him "Mr Pugh", but you call her "Barb". Why?'

That took her aback, he could see. She hesitated. 'Old habits die hard, I guess,' she finally said. 'I didn't realize I did that.'

'How long have you known Mr Pugh?'

'Twenty years. He was my teacher. In high school.' She said the phrases haltingly, as if reluctant to divulge the information. Briskly she rose, and he followed. 'This man is not seventy years old. If I hadn't been distracted, I would have seen that.'

'You had a right to be distracted,' JD began, but she waved his words away.

'He might be fifty, if that. He's taller than Mr Pugh too, by a good two inches.' She leaned over the dead man's head carefully. Dried blood was thickly crusted over the scalp. 'He's bald, like Mr Pugh. Or his head's been shaved. I'll let you know which when I get him on a table.'

'Okay, let's assume you're right and this man is not Jerry Pugh. What made you originally think he was?'

'First, he was sitting in Mr Pugh's chair.'

'You said that before. What do you mean, "his" chair?'

'When he wanders, he always comes here, to this chair. Before the Alzheimer's he was quite a chess player. He'd come here every day after school and there were always people waiting to take him on.' She shook herself lightly. 'Plus there was that.' She pointed to a tweed hat on the ground. 'Mr Pugh wears one just like it. It was pulled over his face, like he was asleep. It fell off when I touched his shoulder and he fell forward.' She paused, biting her lower lip. 'Mr Pugh has a similar trench coat, too.'

JD frowned, not liking that. 'Who knows that Mr Pugh wanders out here?'

Slowly she turned, looked up to meet his eyes. Hers were troubled. 'Everyone in our building. Everyone in any of the buildings nearby.'

KAREN ROSE

He wanders out at different times during the night and day. Why?' She asked the question even though he thought she already knew the answer.

'Who knows you run every morning before dawn?'

'Other runners. Anyone who's up at dawn. Why?' she repeated.

'Because he wasn't killed here. Drew thinks he was transported by wheelchair from the front of your building. Somebody went to a lot of trouble to have him found.'

She looked back at the hat. 'You think someone wanted me to find him.'

He thought exactly that, but didn't want to jump to any conclusions. 'For now, let's leave it at someone going to a lot of trouble to have him found.'

'Hands are in his pockets,' she observed quietly. 'His face is destroyed. Someone wanted him found, but not identified. I think you'll find his fingertips are . . . altered.'

'Or gone,' JD said grimly.

'Or gone,' she repeated evenly. 'Rigor's passed. He's been dead at least two days. I'll get you a better time of death after the exam.' She leaned forward a few inches, studying the facial injuries. 'Blunt object was used. I'll have a better idea—'

'After the exam,' he finished. 'So let's get him transported. I want to check his pockets for ID, but I don't want to chance any evidence falling on the grass here. Can we check his pockets as soon as you unload him at the morgue?'

She studied him, clearly sizing him up. 'Either Stevie's been training you or you just have common sense. A lot of cops would want me to lay him out here.'

Her approval made him feel . . . good. Just as it had the other time they'd met. He didn't think she remembered it and he wasn't in any hurry to bring it up.

A door slammed behind them and as one they looked over their shoulders to see an ME tech pushing a gurney with a folded body bag lying on top. 'I'm just coming back from two weeks out of the office,' Trask said. 'I may have a heavy load, so I may not be able to do the cut today. But if you want to meet me at the morgue, we

YOU BELONG TO ME

can do a cursory exam and go through his pockets right away.'

'I appreciate it. I'll work on locating the Pughs. I want to be sure they're all right.'

'Thank you. I'll suit up and get started.' She looked back at the body slumped over the chess table. 'I want to believe I came along by coincidence, that the placement of this man's body had nothing to do with me.'

'But you don't.'

'Do you?'

He wanted to put her mind at ease, but wouldn't lie to her. 'No.'

She sighed. 'Neither do I.'