

## **Hidden Lives**

### **Chapter 1 Lee and Casey Sunday Evening May 5**

Lee threw her stress ball toward the closed door of the guest bedroom that she'd christened her office, then ducked as it bounced back at her. Picking the yellow smiley face ball off the floor where it had landed, she twisted in her desk chair and prepared to throw the ball at the door once again. As she gave the ball an overhand toss, the door opened. The ball hit the figure standing there, and Lee let out a snort of laughter at the look on her husband Casey's face.

"Sorry, sweetie," she said through her laughter. "That was meant for the door, not you." Lee stood up and walked over to where Casey stood. She picked the ball off the floor and handed it to him. "You can toss it at me, if you want?"

Casey reached out and took the ball but instead of throwing it, he put it in his pocket, then wrapped his arms around his wife. Lee put her head on his shoulder and gave a deep, shuddering sigh.

"What was that all about?" Casey asked.

Lee answered a muffled series of words that Casey couldn't understand. He stepped back so that Lee's face was no longer buried on his shoulder.

"Say again," Casey told her.

"This darn writer's block," Lee answered. "I've written a total of five words tonight. And they're five really bad words."

Casey pulled her back into his chest and gave her a squeeze. They stood there motionless for a few moments. Then Lee took a step backwards and looked up into Casey's face. "You're the best, you know," she said to her husband.

"I know, I know," Casey said, a grin on his face.

Lee gave his arm a swat and went back to her desk chair and sat down. Casey walked over and sat in the recliner next to the desk.

"The kids are down and out. They took their baths with the usual amount of fussing, then insisted I read that wizard gizzard book again -- for the hundredth time, I think." Casey leaned back in the recliner and closed his eyes. "Tell me about it, sweetheart."

Lee hesitated, thinking it through. Casey couldn't be more supportive about her writing but she wasn't sure he'd understand how horrific the inability to write was to a writer. But he had asked, and she wanted to give him the honest answer he deserved. Then she thought she had a way to explain it that would make sense to her police detective husband.

"You know how there have been times on a case when you're stymied? You have no leads? Nothing ties together? Nothing makes sense? You feel like there's nothing you can do and that there will never be?" Lee paused, waiting for Casey's response.

Casey opened his eyes, sat up and nodded. "It's the worst. You feel helpless and hopeless. Is that the way writer's block makes you feel?"

Lee nodded in return. "Yeah, that's it.

Casey stood up and came over to where Lee sat. He reached down and pulled her to her feet. He looked her in the eye and said, "I think you need a distraction."

Lee laughed as she answered, "I always need *that* distraction."

Casey laughed in return and said, "That's not the distraction I mean. But I'm always willing..." He let his voice trail off.

"So what kind of distraction are you talking about?" Lee asked.

"Well, I hadn't mentioned this to you yet but in a couple of weeks the City Council is sponsoring a seminar on stalking, and I'm planning to attend, " Casey told her.

"A seminar on stalking? What, to teach people how to stalk?" Lee asked with a wide grin.

"No, silly. A seminar *about* stalking. What it is, what stalkers do, that kind of thing. It's geared to law enforcement and counselors mainly. But it's open to the public, and I can get you a seat if you're interested in going. Maybe this would serve as a distraction." Then Casey added the clincher. "And it might give you some ideas for your writing."

**Chapter 2**  
**Lee, Casey and Julia**  
**Monday Evening**  
**May 13**

A week or so later, Lee found herself sitting in the front row of the City Hall Auditorium. She was grumbling to herself about Casey's penchant for always sitting in the front row. He did it at church; he did it at any community meeting they went to. Lee's inclination was to sit in the back, something she'd been doing since kindergarten. She did it both to stay out of the limelight but also to get the lay of the land. She liked the vantage point that the rear of the room gave her, letting her look around at everyone, even though mostly what she saw were the backs of people's heads.

Now, here in the front row, she had to restrain herself from turning in her seat to look around the room. She wanted to see who else was here. On their way in, early of course, another one of Casey's predilections, there weren't many people in their seats yet. A couple of men were sitting on the aisle halfway down the rows of seats, and Casey stopped to say hello. He introduced her as his better half, something she liked to hear him say even though it was far from the truth. He told her each man's name and said that they were detectives on the police force in a nearby town.

'We've worked together on a couple of cases,' Casey said.

Lee extended her hand to each man in turn and said, 'I'm pleased to meet you.' She hoped that Casey wouldn't mention that she was here for a distraction, and thankfully, he didn't. They'd moved on down the aisle, and as they walked, Lee whispered, 'Do we have to sit in the first row? Couldn't we sit in the second row?' Under her breath she whispered so low that Casey couldn't hear here, 'Or the hundredth row, please God.'

Casey just gave her that lopsided smile that had been one of the first things she fell in love with and kept on walking till they reached the first row of the auditorium.

As Lee sat looking around the auditorium, she felt the vibration of the phone in her jacket pocket, indicating an incoming text. She surreptitiously took the phone out of her pocket. Lee's mother Julia was babysitting their kids, and Lee was thinking the message might be from her mother. She looked down at the screen in her hand and saw a message from her mother, as she'd expected. It read,

"Babies bathed, storied and in bed. Thx for letting me take care of them."

Thinking she was the one who was thankful, Lee smiled. She held her phone out to Casey for him to read the message. He echoed her smile. They knew how lucky they were to have Julia living next door to them and available at any time to take care of Penny and Paul, their 8-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son.

Lee put the phone back in her pocket just as the president of the City Council walked out on the stage. He made a few remarks then introduced the consultant who was conducting the seminar.

Lee stared at the man on the stage, wondering why he somehow looked vaguely familiar to her. She hadn't caught his name when he was introduced so she opened the seminar packet to see what it was. Josh Walters. The name didn't ring a bell but he did look familiar.

She took out her iPad and started taking notes as the man spoke. Then, curiosity getting the better of her, she Googled Josh Walters. She was surprised at the number of hits that came up. She started to read some of the articles, then stopped, realizing she didn't want to miss the seminar. It was really interesting, full of a lot of ideas.

As Lee went back to taking notes on her iPad, she saw Casey making a gesture of pointing to the iPad and then to himself. Lee smiled and correctly interpreted the gesture as meaning he wanted to use her notes. She nodded her head at him and went back to her note taking.

He'd been doing that since he'd first shown up in Lee's sixth grade class. Casey's dad had been appointed Rivermont Chief of Police, and the Carruthers family had moved here from Chicago. Casey had been assigned to the same homeroom as Lee, and he soon determined that she was the best note-taker in class. And from that had grown his dependence on Lee's excellent notes, which he took advantage of for any of the classes they shared.

Lee was fascinated with the seminar and its presenter. She thought he was quite a handsome man. He seemed to be somewhere in his fifties but she was a poor judge of people's ages. He had gray at the temples but the rest of his hair was dark, wavy and longish. He was tall, a couple of inches over six feet, Lee estimated. He wore a well-tailored suit over his lanky frame. His shirt was a light blue, and his tie looked like red silk. All in all, he made quite a distinguished appearance.

Her fingers began to ache from her rapid note taking. Then she had a brainstorm. She took her iPhone out of her pocket and set it up to record. That gave her the ability to multi-task by Googling Walters again. She kept part of her attention on the seminar and part on the information about Walters that came up on her iPad. She was shocked to see that according to his Wikipedia bio, Walters was actually 63 years old, a couple of years younger than her mother. He certainly didn't look that old. But then her mother didn't look her age either.

Depending mainly on Wikipedia, Lee went back through his life, trying to see if their paths might have crossed somewhere. But it didn't seem that they'd been in the same place at the same time, although she was only able to find information from the past 10 years or so. Google didn't offer up anything about Walters from more than 10 years ago. Maybe it was just one of those instances where Walters resembled someone else she'd met at some time. Finally, she abandoned her search and turned her full attention back to the seminar.

When the seminar was over, Casey asked Lee if she wanted to go to the meet and greet with the seminar presenter. Lee said yes, and they went into a reception area where coffee and cake were being served. They filled out nametags, then got coffee and cake. A line of people stood waiting to meet the presenter, and once they finished eating, Lee and Casey joined the line. The two policemen that Casey had introduced them to were in front of them in the line, and Casey started talking to them. Lee tuned out and sneaked looks at Josh Walters, trying once again to figure out why he looked so familiar. But no matter how hard she searched her memory for Walters or someone who looked like him, she had nothing.

When it was their turn to talk to Josh Walters, Casey introduced himself and then turned to Lee. "This is my wife, Lee. She's a mystery writer."

Lee shook Josh Walters's hand and said, "It was a great seminar. I must tell you I'm suffering from a mad case of writer's block, and your seminar was so interesting and full of ideas, I feel like it might help get me writing again."

Walters seemed to be staring at Lee, and she wondered if she had cake on her face or something. "That's quite a compliment, Mrs. Carruthers." Josh paused, then evidently putting two and two together, he said, "Carruthers? Not L.A. Carruthers?"

Lee reddened a little, and said, "Yes, that's me, L.A. Carruthers in the flesh."

"It's such a pleasure to meet you. I've read all your books." He tilted his head and said, "My apologies, but I thought you were a man. You write like a man." He seemed to realize what he'd said and added, "I meant that in the best possible way. No offense intended."

Lee grinned and said, "None taken. Actually, that's the idea. That's the reason for the initials. My publisher thinks I'll sell more books if readers think L.A. Carruthers is a man."

"Listen, I've got to do the rest of this meet and greet," Josh said, gesturing toward the group of seminar attendees waiting to meet him. "But if you two could hang around for a bit, I'd like to talk with you more."

Casey and Lee exchanged glances and matching grins. "We'd like that, Mr. Walters," Casey said.

"Please, call me Josh," he said.

"And we're Casey and Lee. We'll be over there by the cake and coffee," Casey said.

There was a grouping of several overstuffed chairs by the refreshment area, and Casey and Lee sat down in adjoining chairs.

"More cake?" Casey asked.

Lee looked over at the refreshment table and sighed. "Better not."

Casey stood and said, "Well, I'm going to indulge myself."

He walked over to the table and helped himself to a generous serving of chocolate layer cake with a fluffy chocolate frosting. He also brought a couple of bottles of water with him. He walked back to where Lee sat and handed her one of the bottles.

"Thanks," she said, eyeing his cake with wide eyes.

Casey sat back down in the chair, pulled a fork out of his jacket pocket and dug into the cake. After two bites, he stopped, reached in his pocket and pulled out another fork. "For you, ma'am."

Lee grabbed the fork and took a bite of cake. "Oh my, this is delicious. Much better than that white stuff we had before."

When the two of them had disposed of the cake and bottles of water and disposed of their trash, Lee looked around and said, "Do you still want to wait to talk to Josh Walters?"

"I do if you do. Or we can go home if you want," Casey replied.

"Well, actually, there was something I wanted to tell you. Does Josh Walters look familiar to you? Like you've seen him somewhere before?" Lee asked.

Casey thought for a moment as he glanced over at Josh Walters standing across the room, surrounded by seminar attendees. He shook his head as he said, "No, I've never seen him before."

"I have the funniest feeling that I've seen him or know about him or something. I've searched my mind but can't come up with anything."

Just then, Josh Walters stepped away from the group he'd been standing in and headed toward Casey and Lee. He sat in a chair facing both of them and smiled broadly at them. "Thanks for hanging around. It was a pleasure to meet the two of you. I wanted to tell you again, Lee, how much I enjoy your books."

"That's very kind of you. Let's hope this writing block is a thing of the past. Your seminar certainly gave me a lot to think about," Lee said.

"I hope so," Josh said.

"You know, Josh, you look so familiar to me. I've wracked my brain trying to remember where or when I might have met you or seen you somewhere but haven't had any luck." Lee paused, waiting to see how Walters responded. When he didn't say anything, she decided to jump right in. "Do I look familiar to you? Have we ever met?"

Josh gave her a smile and a tilted head stare. Then he slowly shook his head and said, "Sorry, I don't think I've ever seen you before. Coincidentally enough, you do look like my sister but I'm sure you and I haven't met." He widened his smile and winked at Casey. "I surely would remember meeting such a beautiful woman."

Lee's cheeks reddened at Josh's flattery, and she looked downward, not knowing quite how to respond. Casey put his arm around his wife and said, "She is a beauty, isn't she?"

"You bet!" Josh said with enthusiasm. Then he continued, "By the way, I'm scheduled to do a series of classes on stalking for the Rivermont police department next month so I'll be in town then for a couple of weeks. Perhaps we could have dinner together."

Casey gave a low chuckle and said, "Well, that's interesting."

Josh threw him a quizzical look and said, "I don't understand what you mean."

"Well, I'm chief of detectives so it's possible that some of my men and perhaps even me would be taking your classes," Casey said.

"That *is* interesting," Josh said. He reached in his jacket pocket and pulled out a business card holder. He took out two cards and gave one to Casey and one to Lee. "Let's stay in touch. I'll make sure we schedule that dinner."

With that, he stood, and Casey and Lee stood also. Josh extended his hand first to Casey and then to Lee. Then he was gone, walking back to the group of seminar attendees.

Casey and Lee stood there for a moment, silent, watching as Josh rejoined the group. Then they headed toward the doors of the auditorium and emerged into the lobby, lost in their own thoughts. In the lobby, Lee spotted a table where a local bookstore was selling Josh Walters's books and headed over to the table, with Casey trailing behind her. At the table, Lee saw that two of his books were for sale, both on the topic of stalking. Lee flipped through first one book and then the other.

Lately, she'd been trying to limit her book purchases, using her nearby library instead. This was a strategy intended to prevent her massive collection of books from taking over the house. But something about the man and the seminar short-circuited her best intentions. Lee pulled out her credit card and bought both books.

Casey took the book bag from her and said, "May I carry your books, little lady?"

Lee laughed and hooked her arm in his. In lockstep, they headed toward the elevator that led to the parking garage.

As they walked, Lee broke the silence. "So what did you think?" she asked.

"I don't know," Casey said. "I was impressed with the seminar and with the man, at least at first. But after you asked him about how familiar he looked to you, I got the weirdest vibe. He didn't seem to take your

question seriously. And that remark about how beautiful you are seemed inappropriate to me, no matter how beautiful you are -- which you are. It just felt uncomfortable, you know?"

"I know," Lee said. "The whole exchange felt discomfoting. I don't understand it." By this time they'd reached level 3 of the parking garage where they'd parked. As they reached their vehicle, Lee did her usual eye-roll at Casey's mode of transportation. He had recently been promoted to chief of detectives and was thus entitled to a more prestigious department vehicle. Back when he was named lead detective, he'd inherited the oldest operational vehicle in the department, a white Bronco, similar to the one OJ drove in his infamous slow highway chase. Lee had loved that car and relished the few occasions she was allowed to ride in it.

Now, they got into the shiny black stretch Suburban, suggestive of the vehicles used by the FBI and Secret Service. Lee thought the Rivermont police department must have latched on to or attached itself to some government vehicle contract because the police chief and all the deputy chiefs drove new Suburbans. Lee described Casey's as "your tricked-out Suburban" equipped with nerf bars, bug shield and slick-looking Black Beast wheels.

Evidently this particular vehicle, the Burb as Lee nicknamed the vehicle, had been intended for some high-end customer who had ended up not taking possession. The department must have gotten a deal on it, a deal so good they couldn't turn it down, even though it was the fanciest police vehicle on the road. The purchasing department had tried to assign it to the chief but he'd refused, saying his standard Suburban was perfectly fine for him. Purchasing had tried department after department, ending up with the detectives. The head of purchasing was an old school chum of Casey's, and she'd begged him to have the vehicle assigned to him. Casey, soft heart and all, had finally, reluctantly, agreed.

Actually, Lee enjoyed riding in the Burb. It was roomy and rode comfortably. Her only complaint was the fact that Casey habitually parked it on the street in front of their house, rather than in their three-car garage. To make matters worse, he left the keys in the console and most times, forgot to lock the vehicle.

Lee regularly scolded him about the unlocked Burb with the keys easily accessible inside. "What kind of police officer are you? Leaving your assigned vehicle available for any thief who might be in the neighborhood?"

Casey's response was usually, "This is a gated community. Safe as it could be."

To which, Lee would say, "But there's never anyone at the gate!"

Now, inside the Burb, Lee fastened her seat belt, then pulled out her phone. She tapped in a quick text to her mother saying they were leaving downtown and would be home in about 20 minutes.

"We don't have to have dinner with Walters, if you don't want to. I can easily make some excuse when he's back in town," Casey said.

"I think I'd like to follow through with the dinner. I'm curious about the man. And I'm curious about why I find him so familiar," Lee said.

"Whatever you say," Casey promised.

Forty-five minutes later, Lee was sitting in the family room with her mother. When Lee and Casey had arrived home, they found Julia Dennison on the sofa in front of a fire in the family room, watching CNN. Ever

the multi-tasker, she was also crocheting a red, white and blue afghan for Paul. Earlier in the year, Julia crocheted a similar afghan for granddaughter Penny, this one in lavender, Penny's favorite color, at least for the moment.

Lee had leaned down and kissed her mother on the cheek, asking her to stay and visit for a few minutes. Julia had agreed and offered to make hot chocolate for them. Lee had approved that offer and then she and Casey had gone upstairs to check on Penny and Paul. They had kissed their fast-asleep children and adjusted their covers.

Casey had begged off from the hot chocolate and had gone to take a shower and, as he put it, hit the sheets. Lee went back downstairs to join her mother.

"Casey's a no-show on the hot chocolate, Mom," Lee announced as she entered the family room.

"Then it's just us girls. Come sit here beside me," Julia said, patting the sofa cushion next to her.

Lee sat down, and Julia poured a cup of hot chocolate for each of them from a pink flowered china teapot that had been in the family for generations. Lee hadn't wanted to take the teapot when her mother offered it, afraid that she or the kids would break it. But Julia had insisted.

"Sure, it's an heirloom but it needs to be used. It needs to be loved," Julia pointed out.

Lee had finally agreed to take it and was glad she had. Penny and Paul knew it was something special and loved when Lee made hot chocolate in it for them. But they still wouldn't touch the teapot, afraid of breaking it.

"So how was the seminar?" Julia asked, taking a careful sip of the hot liquid.

"It was really good," Lee answered. "We both enjoyed it. I took notes during the first part but my hand got so tired, I recorded it on my phone. I'll send you a transcript of my notes."

Julia grinned as she asked, "Did Casey do his regular thing about your notes?"

Lee laughed and nodded. "Of course. We also had to arrive early and sit in the front row. My husband is nothing but consistent." Her words drew a laugh from Julia.

The women sat in a companionable silence, drinking their hot chocolate and watching the fire. After a few minutes, Lee pulled out her phone and located a picture on it. She held the phone out to her mother and said, "Here's the presenter. His name is Josh Walters."

Julia took the phone, but put it in her lap while she reached in her jacket pocket for her reading glasses. Glasses on, she picked up Lee's phone and looked at the photo. She gave a barely perceptible start and felt the color begin to drain from her face. Taking a breath, she handed the phone back to Lee who laid the phone on the coffee table in front of her. Then, trying to keep her voice calm and noncommittal, Julia asked, "What did you say his name was again?"

Lee looked at her mother, wondering if she'd imagined Julia's reaction to the photo. "His name is Josh Walters. Evidently, he's fairly well-known for the stalking seminars that he presents." Lee paused, then said, "Mom, are you okay? You look sort of pale."

"I'm fine, sweetie. But I would like a glass of water before I head home. For some reason, I'm really thirsty," Julia said.



"Sure," Lee said. "I'll be right back."

The moment Lee left the room, Julia picked up Lee's phone from the coffee table, then took her own phone out of her jacket pocket. She held the two phones next to one another and used the AirDrop function to copy the photo of the seminar leader from Lee's phone to her phone. She put Lee's phone back on the coffee table and slipped her own phone in her jacket pocket. Lee's iPad was on the coffee table next to Lee's phone. Julia picked it up and saw a brochure and a business card from the seminar presenter tucked inside the iPad case. She pulled a notebook out of her purse and quickly wrote down the name, contact info and address of the seminar presenter. She managed to get the iPad back on the coffee table just as her daughter returned to the family room carrying a glass of water.

Lee sat down on the couch next to her mother and handed her the glass of water. She watched Julia intently as her mother sipped at the water for a moment, then set the glass on the coffee table. To Lee, Julia still looked pale and her hands seemed to be shaking. Lee reached out and took her mother's hand in hers. Julia's hand was cold and clammy, and Lee shook her head, saying, "Mom, what's wrong?"

Julia shook her head also and said a brisk, "Nothing's wrong, sweetie. I'm just a little tired. It's been a busy day, you know."

Julia leaned over and kissed Lee on the cheek, then withdrew her hand from her daughter's.

"Now, I have to get going. I have a lot to do tomorrow." Julia stood and gathered up her handbag, crocheting bag and her iPad. She bent down and patted Lee on the cheek, then headed out the door.

Lee stood up quickly and followed after her mother. She was getting a disconcerting vibe from Julia and wasn't quite sure what to do about it. "I'll walk you home," Lee said, heading for the front door where Julia's coat and her own coat were hanging on an antique brass coat tree in a corner of the entry hall.

"Not necessary," Julia said as she grabbed her coat and opened the front door. Before Lee could say another word, her mother was out the door, closing it firmly behind her.

Lee stood there, speechless. This was not like her mother at all. She was tempted to follow after her mother to find out what was going on but then decided against it. She would get to the bottom of it tomorrow. She went around turning off lights and making sure the doors were locked. She took her iPad out of her handbag and seeing that the battery was low, she picked up one of the chargers from the kitchen counter. As she headed upstairs, she wondered if Casey was still awake. She hoped he was because she wanted to get his take on Julia's odd behavior.

Julia fast-walked to her house next door. She pulled her key ring out of her purse and unlocked the side door to the garage, the nearest entrance to her house from Lee's. She'd left the garage lights on, knowing she'd come home this way.

Inside the house, she turned on the kitchen lights and put her purse, crocheting and iPad on the kitchen counter. She hung her coat in the hall closet, then went down the hall to the master bedroom. There, she sat down at her desk and pulled her cell phone out of her jacket pocket. She scrolled through her contacts to the name Elena Estes with a landline number listed next to her name. She dialed the number and waited through one ring, two rings, three rings, four rings, then voice mail.

"Hi, Elena, it's Julia, Julia Dennison. I know it's late but I really need to talk to you. Something serious has come up. I don't want to leave any details but trust me, you need to call me back as soon as you get this message, no matter what time it is. Thank you -- and talk to you soon." Then realizing she'd forgotten to give her number to Elena, Julia left her cell number on the message.

She ended the call, then put her cell phone on the desk and attached the charger lying there. She leaned back in the desk chair and closed her eyes. She wished she'd had Elena's cell number so she could have sent the picture of the seminar presenter to Elena. But sending the photo could wait until she'd had the chance to talk to her old friend. For a few minutes, she let her mind wander, trying to not think about the potential cataclysm about to descend on her.

Elena Estes walked into the sprawling mountain home outside Boulder she shared with her husband Doug, a senior pilot at Mountain Airways. Elena was executive vice president of corporate communications for the airline, an extremely well-compensated position. Last year her salary exceeded a million dollars and her total compensation (retirement, health insurance, deferred compensation and other benefits) was nearing two million dollars. Doug's salary was a not-too shabby \$200,000. So the couple was most likely in that top 1% that was so much in the news.

Doug was on a flight to Manila and wouldn't return home for several days. Elena had just gotten back from a marketing conference in Florida and was exhausted. As she walked through the villa, she shed clothes as she went. First off were the stilettos she felt obliged to wear as part of her business attire. She was an attractive 60 plus and looked 15 years younger. She wore her blonde hair in an updo and now, that was the next thing she dealt with, pulling out pins till her hair floated around her shoulders. She dropped the jacket of her suit on one of the three family room sofas. The skirt followed, ending up on a recliner. Standing in front of the wall windows that looked out on the mountain range, she wore only a white camisole top and a short black silk half slip. She reached down and pulled off her pantyhose. Many businesswomen nowadays went barelegged but Elena liked the sleek feel of nylon and hadn't yet abandoned the pantyhose.

In the kitchen, she poured herself a glass of sparkling water from the bottle in the fridge and drank it down in one gulp. The oversized wall clock in the kitchen said it was half past nine in the evening. Elena had checked her calendar on the cab ride home and knew she had an early morning meeting tomorrow with the airline CEO, Todd Bannister. She had no idea what he wanted to talk about but she looked forward to seeing him. They'd worked together for years, at two other airlines, and there'd even been an affair years ago, when Todd was still married to his first wife.

She'd eaten on the plane, a relatively decent meal in first class. She remembered a hundred years ago, when she entered the airline industry as a flight attendant and the food on planes was something special. Now most passengers were lucky to get a bag of peanuts and a bottle of water. She headed toward the master bedroom suite, just off the kitchen. A quick shower, she thought, then to bed I go.

As she walked into the huge master bedroom, a flashing red light caught her eye. The landline phone next to her side of the king-sized bed was also an answering machine, and the flashing red light was an indication that someone had left a message. Elena hardly ever used the landline these days. Her cell phone was her means of communications, just like everyone else in her life. Well, except for her mother. That's probably who the message was from.

She debated whether to check the message first or whether to go ahead and take a shower. The shower won. She felt grimy after the flight and although she knew that wasn't really the case, she wanted to wash away that feeling of being dirty.

In the large master bathroom she shed the rest of her clothes and stepped into the glass-enclosed shower. Up here in the mountains, the house was so far from other people that window coverings weren't necessary. The house was full of windows, all open to the world. When she was younger, Elena liked to parade around nude but now she preferred the feel of a silk robe against her skin, even though she was in great shape for her age.

Getting out of the shower, she wrapped a towel around her head and dried off her body with another one of the over-sized, over-fluffy towels she was partial to. She slipped into the bright red silk robe Doug had bought for her for no reason at all -- the best kind of present, she thought.

She walked out of the bathroom and headed toward the bedside phone to check the message. But she stopped in her tracks as she heard the far-off ring of her cell phone. She stood there for a moment, trying to remember where she'd left the phone. It was probably in her jacket pocket. And her jacket was on one of the living room sofas. She turned around and headed toward the living room. She began to walk faster, wanting to get to the phone before the call dropped to voice mail. She made it just in time, not looking at the screen to see who was calling, saying a breathless, "Hello!"

"Hello, beautiful. You sound out of breath." Her husband's voice brought a huge smile to Elena's lips.

"Hi, sweetheart! How are you? How's Manila?" She sat down on the sofa where her jacket lay and pulled a nearby afghan over her.

"Manila is Manila. Actually, it's beautiful this time of year. No rain, lots of sun, and lots of breezes. I wish you had come along with me. We could have had a second honeymoon," Doug said.

"I think we've already had a second honeymoon, and our third and fourth..." Elena let her voice trail off.

On the other end of the line, Doug chuckled, and said, "Right, right. So how was the conference? How was Florida?"

"Both were good," Elena answered. "Both were exhausting. I just got out of the shower, and I'm about to go to bed." She thought of the phone message on the bedroom phone but didn't mention it to Doug. She was sure the call was from her mother, and Doug and her mother were close to being mortal enemies. "What time is it there in Manila?" Elena asked.

"10:45," Doug said, then added, "a.m. So it must be," he paused a moment, then continued, "9:45 p.m. there."

"Right," Elena said. "And I'm going to bed the minute we get off the phone."

"I'll let you go then. I'll give you a call at the office tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay," Elena answered. "Love you."

"I love you, too," Doug said. "Sweet dreams."

Elena ended the call and slipped the phone into the pocket of her robe. She went to the kitchen and poured herself another glass of sparkling water, then took her nightly pills -- melatonin and a low-dose blood pressure medication.

She roamed the house, turning off lights, checking to make sure the all doors were locked and the security alarm was set. In the bedroom, she took off the robe and pulled on an oversized University of Illinois tee shirt that once belonged to Doug but which she had commandeered. She got her cell phone out of the robe pocket and put it on the charger on the dresser. She turned out the bedroom light, checked to make sure the alarm clock was set for 6 a.m. and was about to climb under the covers when she once again saw the flashing red light of the answering machine.

"Rats!" she said and switched on the bedside lamp. Sitting down on the bed next to the nightstand, she pressed the play button to listen to the message. Instead of her mother's faint voice, she heard a woman's voice announcing that it was Julia Dennison.

Elena gasped and began to listen intently to Julia's message.

"I know it's late but I really need to talk to you. Something serious has come up. I don't want to leave any details but trust me, you need to call me back as soon as you get this message, no matter what time it is. Thank you -- and talk to you soon." Then, almost as an afterthought, Julia left her cell number on the message.

"What in God's name could Julia want?" Elena thought. The two women hadn't seen each other for years although they were friends on Facebook and kept up with each other's lives that way. The bedside alarm clock read 10 p.m. straight up. That meant it was 11 p.m. in Rivermont. As Elena remembered, Julia was something of a night owl and would most likely still be up.

She opened the drawer of the bedside table and pulled out a notepad and pen. She replayed Julia's message and wrote down Julia's cell number. She picked up the receiver of the landline and punched in the digits of Julia's cell number. The phone rang three times before a once-familiar voice answered.

"Elena! Thank you so much for calling me back," Julia said.

"Of course. Your message sounded urgent," Elena replied.

"It is urgent," Julia said. "I don't know where to begin.

Elena smiled to herself as she said, "Just begin at the beginning."

And so, in an instant, the once best friends were again connected.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Julia and Elena**

#### **32 years ago**

Elena Estes and Julia Dennison met 32 years ago in Washington D.C. They were both newly minted college graduates who were starting internships at a small boutique advertising agency in D.C. They were the same age but their similarities ended there.

Elena was tall, slender and blonde. Her degree was in communications, and she was just doing the internship until she could get her dream job: flight attendant. She wanted to travel the world, see the sights. She had an adventurous streak, almost a wild streak. But she also had enough common sense to rein in her crazier ideas.

Julia was medium height, with a curvy figure. Her short black curls were maintenance-free, for which she was eternally grateful. She didn't have the desire or interest in messing with her hair on a daily basis. So having hair that fell into place on its own was quite a blessing for her. She was levelheaded and sensible but with a streak of fun that made her sensibility more palatable to her fun-loving colleagues and friends.

On their first day at the ad agency, they'd been thrown together in an orientation class and they'd stayed close for the rest of their time working at the agency. Their internships were six months in duration. At the end of the six months, Elena had still not gotten her dream job as a flight attendant. The managing partner of the agency had no clue that this pretty blonde girl had plans other than advertising for her career. So he offered her a position as an entry-level copywriter. Elena had accepted the job but in her heart she knew she'd be out the door the moment one of the airlines to which she'd applied offered her a job.

Julia, on the other hand, had fallen in love with advertising. In college, she'd majored in English, intending to eventually teach. She too was offered a copywriter job by the agency and accepted the position with enthusiasm. To her, it was just the first of many dream jobs to come.

The two newly minted copywriters had decided to rent an apartment together. They'd both been staying temporarily with friends because their entry-level jobs didn't pay enough for each to afford her own apartment. But by splitting expenses they were able to lease a two-bedroom townhouse close enough to the office to be able to walk to work. Because neither one had a car, the proximity to work was one of the top positive features of the townhouse.

It was the middle '80s with Ronald Reagan in the White House and the economy booming. The agency had a lobbying firm as a client, and the two lobbyists in the firm were on the periphery of politics and were able to steer clear of the Iran–Contra scandal disrupting the nation's capitol. The lobbying firm was run by two college buddies of the managing partner and contributed substantially to the ad agency's revenue.

Other revenue streams came from the diverse group of clients the agency had cultivated. Through the years, Matt Witticomb, managing partner of Witticomb and Merrill Advertising, had attracted clients in the food industry and the apparel industry, two small book publishers, a symphony orchestra and a craft beer brewer -- an eclectic group to say the least. The agency's largest client was a major airline, headquartered in DC. Once again Matt's college connections had served him well. The airline's marketing director, Todd Bannister, had been a fraternity brother of Matt and that relationship had paid off well for the firm.

For the most part, Julia and Elena worked on different teams at the agency, with one exception. One of the lobbyists, Art Crowley, had taken a shine to them, calling them his "ad girls" and insisting that they both be assigned to his account.

Matt had fussed a bit about this, saying no one account needed two copywriters but he eventually caved. He told Julia and Elena to work together with the account executive on the account. He also counseled them, in separate one-on-one meetings, not to let his college buddy try to seduce them. This admonition had embarrassed Julia no end. She'd blushed, lowered her head and promised that nothing untoward would happen.

Elena, on the other hand, had laughed, getting a kick out of Matt's warning. Matt, at first taken aback by Elena's reaction, had finally joined Elena in her amusement.

Elena had said, "Matt, I'm a big girl, and I can take care of myself." They'd left it at that. Matt never knew for sure, but he would have bet heavy money that Elena and his college buddy, Art Crowley, had definitely had a fling.

The funny thing was that the ever-demure Julia was the one who had a flagrantly public fling, not with Art Crowley, but with his business partner Trevor March. Trev, as everyone called him, was a few years older than Julia and was the fun-loving half of the lobbying firm's partnership.

Art and Trev had met when they were college freshmen and had been friends ever since. Matt Witticomb was a senior when Art and Trev pledged his fraternity. He'd served as Art's pledge father and had failed miserably at whipping Art into shape. Trev, on the other hand, despite his seemingly "devil-may-care" attitude, had excelled at whatever he did, both academically and as an officer in the fraternity.

Art Crowley came from money, serious money. His father was a former senator who'd parlayed his inherited wealth and his political clout into a huge fortune. Art spent his life benefiting from his father's wealth and position. Trev, on the other hand, grew up poor, the son of a single mom who worked two jobs to support Trev and his sister Delilah.

Art and Trev's friendship was cemented forever one Friday afternoon in their senior year at college. It was an unseasonably hot day in late September, and the guys had skipped their last classes to go swimming in a nearby quarry. The quarry was off-limits to the college students, and swimming was absolutely forbidden, which made it all the more attractive to the adventurous.

At one point, Trev dove off the bank and didn't immediately surface. Art had followed his friend into the water and had looked around for Trev. Not seeing any sign of him, Art started diving, looking for Trev. The water was dark, almost impenetrable. Art started to panic but kept up his search. Finally, he spotted Trev caught in a submerged tree. He grabbed Trev's arm and loosened him from the tree, then managed to get him to the surface. He swam to the bank, towing Trev behind him. Trev was an unconscious dead weight, and as Art swam, he wasn't sure he was going to make it. By the time he reached the shore, Art could barely breathe. How ironic that an afternoon of fun in the sun would kill them both.

Art pulled Trev out of the water onto the bank and started to do CPR, something the fraternity had insisted all members learn. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity to Art, Trev gave a gasping cough, spewed water all over Art, and began to breathe on his own. The two young men had lain there on the shore, gasping for breath. Finally, Art sat up and said to Trev, "We've got to get you to the emergency room, to make sure you're all right."

"Hell, no!" Trev had exclaimed. "We're not going to the ER or anywhere else but the frat house. We're trespassing by being here, you know that. We could get into major trouble if the police found out."

Art had considered this for a moment, then said, "Well, maybe you're right about the ER. But I'm going to call Matt and see if he knows a close-mouthed doc who'll take a look at you."

Art had stayed in touch with his pledge father, Matt Witticomb, who had opened a small advertising agency in nearby Washington, DC. Art got Trev into his car and back to the fraternity house. There, he got Trev up to the room they shared, then phoned Matt. An hour later, a middle-aged man carrying a black case appeared at the front door to the fraternity house, asking to see Art Crowley. The pledge manning the front door showed the man upstairs to Art's room. Art explained to the doctor what had happened to Trev. The doctor did a thorough examination of Trev and pronounced him fit but prescribed a good night's rest. Art tried to pay the doctor but the man said it had already been taken care of.

From that day forward, Trev was Art's absolute confederate. In word and action, Trev told Art whatever he wanted, it was his. Art had accepted Trev's allegiance but had never thought he'd have need of his friend's assistance.

**Chapter 5**  
**Lee and Casey**  
**Monday Evening**  
**May 13**

Casey was propped up in their king-sized bed watching the late news with the sound muted and the closed captioning on. That was his attempt to keep the TV from waking Penny and Paul, an absolute no-no during the school year.

Lee stripped off her clothes and stepped into the hall to throw them down the laundry chute. Casey gave her nakedness an appreciative whistle, then cocked his head questioningly.

"Not tonight, cowboy," Lee whispered, also not wanting to wake the kids. She quickly slipped into a long flannel nightgown. She went into the bathroom for her nighttime ritual of brushing her teeth and washing her face. Then, she came back into the bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed on Casey's side and laid her head on his shoulder. He gave her a squeeze, then asked, "Something wrong?"

"I'm not sure," Lee answered slowly. "Mom acted kind of weird when she left. It was like she couldn't get out of here fast enough. That's not like her at all. Usually she drags out her departure. But not tonight."

"Maybe she was just tired. You know how Penny and Paul are with her. They keep her going every minute," Casey suggested.

"Maybe," Lee agreed, then added, "But it seemed more than that."

"Like what?" Casey asked.

"I don't know exactly. We were talking, I was telling her about tonight's seminar, I showed her a picture of the presenter..." Lee's voice trailed off. "You know, it was right after I showed her the picture of Josh Walters on my iPhone that it seemed like she couldn't get out of there fast enough. I almost went after her to get an explanation -- I was that worried. But then I decided it could wait until tomorrow."

"I wonder if maybe your Mom knows Josh Walters. She's got some fairly impressive connections, you know," Casey said.

"Could be. But why didn't she say something? And it was as if she didn't want me to see her reaction to the photo." Lee leaned over and kissed Casey, then stood up and went over to her side of the bed. She slipped under the covers and turned out the bedside lamp.

A moment later, Casey asked, "Do you mind if I keep the news on for a few more minutes?" There was no answer, and he grinned as he looked over and saw that his wife had already fallen asleep.



Chapter 4  
Julia and Elena  
Monday Evening  
May 13

Julia took a deep breath, sighed and tried to think of the words to tell Elena what was going on.

"What's up, Jules?" Elena asked at last, reverting to her old nickname for Julia.

"It's something bad, Elena," Julia said, trying to keep her voice steady.

"Just say it," came Elena's gentle words.

"I think Trev is alive," Julia said, almost whispering the words.

There was silence on Elena's end of the line as she tried to process what Julia had said. Finally, she spoke. "Julia, Trevor March died almost 32 years ago. You know that." Elena paused, waiting to see what Julia would say but there was nothing but silence on the line.

"Julia, why do you think Trev is alive?" Elena asked.

Julia cleared her throat and started to speak. "This evening, my daughter Lee showed me a photo of a man, a man I would swear is Trevor March, 30 plus years older, of course. Supposedly his name is Josh Walters and he's some sort expert on stalking. My daughter and her husband attended a seminar on stalking he presented tonight. Lee took a picture of him and then showed me the picture when they got home. Give me your cell number, and I'll send you the photo."

Elena recited her cell number, and Julia scribbled it on a pad of paper. "I'm going to put you on hold while I text you the photo," Julia told Elena.

A minute later, Julia was back on the phone call. She asked Elena, "Did you get the photo?"

Elena answered, "Yes, I got the photo."

Julia waited for a moment, then asked, "Well, what do you think?"

"It's been 32 years, Jules," Elena said slowly. Then she added, "But I see what you mean. It sure looks like Trev, albeit 32 years later."

Julia said, "I'm sitting here in front of my laptop. I Googled Josh Walters while I was waiting for you to call back. I couldn't find any trace of him farther back than 10 years. It's as though he didn't exist before that."

"Give me a second to get my laptop," Elena said. Julia could hear her setting the receiver down and then moving around. In a couple of minutes, Elena was back on the line.

The two women compared search results, with Elena asking if Julia had looked at LinkedIn and Julia asking Elena if she had tried to find his Facebook page.

"It's absolutely amazing what you can find out about a person these days," Julia said.

Elena agreed and said, "It's sort of horrifying, actually. I've never had the nerve to Google my own name for fear of what I'll find."

"I know," Julia agreed. "I've Googled myself and it is horrifying. So what do you think?"

"I don't know what to think. How could Trev be alive? He drowned 31, 32 years ago." Elena paused, then continued. "As far as I ever heard, his body was never recovered."

"No, it wasn't," Julia said. "They found his jacket with a business card case still in it but that's all they found."

"Julia," Elena said in a soft voice, "does your daughter know about Trev?"

"No, absolutely not. No one but you knows." Julia's voice was harsh as she spoke the words.

For a moment, there was silence on the line with neither woman speaking. Then Julia said, "I'm sorry if I sounded harsh. I didn't mean to be that way with you. You were my best friend back then, and I trusted you more than anyone else. I still trust you. I guess I wanted to bounce this all off you and see if you had any suggestions about what I could do."

"Well," Elena began, "you need to find out if there's any chance that this Josh person is Trevor March. I guess that means hiring someone to investigate Walters. Do you know anyone?"

Julia chuckled as she said, "My son-in-law is a homicide detective so I guess the answer is yes, I certainly know someone. The question is whether I want to have him be the investigator. I wouldn't want him to find out about Lee." She paused, thinking, then added, "But maybe there's someone else, someone just as good."

"Who?" Elena asked.

"My son-in-law Casey's father, Jack Carruthers. He's the former police chief here in Rivermont. I might be able to come up with some cover story that doesn't involve Lee," Julia said.

"That sounds like it might work. But answer me this, why would you want to know if Josh Walters is really Trevor March?" Elena asked.

"That's a good question, E," Julia said, using her old nickname for Elena. Julia thought for a moment, then said, "I guess for closure." She sighed, took a deep breath and continued. "When Trevor died, I was devastated. I couldn't believe he would have committed suicide. But then when Art Crowley started spewing out all the trash talk about the death of that model, whatever her name was, I began to think that maybe Trev had actually killed himself."

Again there was a silence, then Julia said, steel in her voice, "I hated having to believe a word that came out of Art Crowley's filthy mouth."

"I know," Elena agreed. "I felt the same way. When I first heard Art's version of things, I thought, 'What a cock and bull story that is!' What kind of friend would hang someone out to dry like that?"

Thirty-two years ago, a model named Natalia had died while on one of Art Crowley's infamous river cruises. In Crowley's statement to the police, he said that Trevor March had accidentally killed the model he was having an affair with. Supposedly Trevor March couldn't stand the guilt of what had happened and had jumped overboard.

"I couldn't believe that Trev was involved with that woman. I always thought she was little more than a high-priced call girl. Of course, after Trev and I broke up, he was in a bad place so who knows what he might have done or who he might have started seeing," Julia said.

"You know, you never told me the reason for the break-up," Elena said.

"I know," Julia said.

"Well, don't you think enough time has gone by that you can now tell me why you broke up with Trev?" Elena asked.

"The reason I didn't tell you back then was because it involved Art Crowley. You were hot and heavy with him at the time, and I didn't want to interfere with that," Julia said.

"You knew about Art and me?" Elena asked, the surprise evident in her voice.

"Yes, of course, I knew. But I made sure to not let on to you that I knew," Julia said.

"Why?" Elena asked.

"Oh, come on, E!" Julia said. "Despite having more money than God, Art Crowley was a low-life. I couldn't bear the thought that you were with him. I couldn't accept it. I guess maybe I thought that if I didn't acknowledge the relationship, it would go away."

"Oh, for heaven's sake! That's ridiculous," Elena said. Then she laughed and said, "But you were right. The relationship did go away."

Julia laughed too, then said, "But really, Elena, how could you have been with such a dishonest sleazeball?"

"He wasn't that bad," Elena said.

"I beg to differ," Julia said. "Art Crowley was the definition of sleazeball. He was a disreputable, disgusting, despicable scumbag."

"Wow! Why don't you tell me how you really feel, kid?"

Julia hesitated for a moment before continuing the conversation. She'd never told Julia about the time that Crowley tried to attack her. He'd been drinking heavily at the agency Christmas party. He'd caught her in one of the conference rooms and had grabbed her and tried to have sex with her. She'd managed to grab a heavy binder off the conference table and throw it at his head. It glanced off his forehead, breaking the skin but not doing serious damage. It had been enough of a distraction for Julia to escape out of the conference room. She'd run to her desk, picked up her purse, got her coat from the cloakroom and ran out of the office without a word to anyone.

The next day, she'd told Matt Witticomb about what Art had done. Matt had made sure she was all right, that she hadn't been hurt, that Crowley hadn't succeeded in attacking her. She assured him that she was okay but that she wanted to make sure it didn't happen again. Matt told her he'd handle it. He suggested she take a few extra days off. It was the holidays, and Julia was planning on going home to Rivermont for Christmas. He reached in his desk drawer, took out his checkbook and proceeded to write a check for her.

"This is your Christmas bonus," he said as he handed the check to her.

Julia gasped when she saw the amount. It far surpassed any bonus she'd received at the agency. As she left Matt's office, check in hand, she felt vaguely uneasy about the whole episode with the agency head. But she put it out of her mind, glad to be going home a few days early. Her parents would be delighted at her arrival and her extra time with them.

Now, for a moment she was tempted to tell Elena exactly what had happened with Crowley and why she felt the way had about him. But then she decided now was not the time. She wanted to concentrate on the matter at hand -- was Trevor March alive?

"Listen, Elena, I'd better go," Julia said. "I'll update you tomorrow after I talk with Jack Carruthers." Julia heard Elena start to protest but she ended the call. She was beginning to think that contacting Elena had been a bad idea. Elena had been too close to Art Crowley. Part of Julia wondered where Elena's true allegiance lay.

Whatever was going on, Julia was convinced the answer could be found with Art Crowley.

**Chapter 6**  
**Elena**  
**Monday Evening**  
**May 13**

Elena sat with the receiver of her landline phone still pressed against her ear. Why had Julia hung up so suddenly? And she hadn't told Elena why she broke up with Trev or why she had such a hatred for Art Crowley. What was going on? Finally, Elena hung up the receiver. She sat on the edge of the bed for a few minutes, thinking. What to do? What to do?

Never in a million years would she have thought that Trevor March was alive. If anyone knew the truth, it would be Art. She and her former lover had kept in touch, albeit tangentially, over the years, a phone call here and there. Elena sighed, clicked off the light and got under the covers. Tomorrow she would do what she could.

Her mind began formulating a to-do list for the morning. Call her assistant and let her know she would be flying to DC for a couple of days, and have her book a hotel room downtown, somewhere close to Crowley's office. Call Operations and get a seat on the first flight to DC. Call Doug and tell him she had to go to DC. Hopefully, Doug would accept the trip as routine and not require an explanation. If he did question her, she hoped she could satisfy his curiosity without telling him the whole back-story. He knew nothing of her involvement with Art Crowley, and she hoped to keep it that way. She'd tried to keep the more disreputable parts of her past from Doug, not wanting to disillusion him. He thought she walked on water, and she wanted to continue being loved that way.

Of course, there might come a day when she would tell Doug about her past or, heaven forbid, he could find out on his own. It wasn't a pretty story, and in her heart of hearts, she wanted it to stay hidden.

She tried to quiet her racing thoughts. She was exhausted from her day and wanted to get to sleep. But she was unable to turn off her mind. Never had she thought the past would jump up to confront her after all these years. She wondered how much Julia would be able to discover. She wondered if Julia would find out how much she, Elena, knew. Nothing, she hoped.

Finally, thankfully, Elena felt herself begin to drift off, and she gave herself up to the forgetfulness of sleep.

**Chapter 7**  
**Lee**  
**Tuesday Morning**  
**May 14**

The next morning, Casey was up early and out of the house before 7 a.m. He'd offered to delay his departure and take Penny and Paul to school but Lee said she'd do it.

"I have some errands to run so it works out fine for me." She kissed her husband goodbye and stood at the front window watching as he left in the Burb. To add aggravation to anxiety over the vehicle, it had a diesel engine. Lee worried that Casey would get low on fuel and be unable to find a station that sold diesel fuel. They seemed to be few and far between in the area.

Lee started to walk away from the window when she saw her mother's car pull out of her driveway next door and head down the street, close behind the Burb. She wondered where her mother was going so early in the morning. Julia was an early riser and always had been but she didn't often leave the house before eight or nine in the morning, hardly ever at seven o'clock.

Lee thought back to her conversation with her mother the night before, trying to remember if her mother had mentioned an early morning meeting or errand but couldn't recall anything like that. Since Lee's childhood, her mother had served as a marketing and advertising consultant to the city of Rivermont, working closely with the city's development division. She had an office at City Hall but also did a lot of work out of her home. That had been convenient when Lee was growing up. Julia had been able to take her to school and pick her up and spend the rest of the day with her. During her childhood summers, Lee had attended a variety of day camps, learning archery, skating, and painting, plus participating in a whole host of activities. She'd had a good childhood but still had missed having a father in the picture.

Julia had told toddler Lee about her father going to heaven before Lee was born. Julia had assured Lee that her father was watching over her as her own special guardian angel. Little girl Lee had pictured him as a winged angel up in the sky perched on a cloud, holding a golden harp. The image had been a reassuring one to a little girl and had never quite disappeared from her mind. When Lee was older, her mother told her that her father had been in the service and had died while overseas. Lee had a picture of him in his uniform in her room on her bedside table. She'd tried to find some resemblance or similarities in their appearances but other than both having dark hair, they didn't seem to share any of the same facial characteristics.

Although she'd never told her mother, Lee had felt the lack of family in her life. Julia had told her that both she and her father were only children whose parents had died young. Julia's parents had died when Lee was an infant, her mother of an out-of-the-blue heart attack and her father of leukemia. Julia had been devastated by their deaths and had clung to her daughter as her only remaining family.

Fortunately for Lee, her mother had a group of close friends in Rivermont who had served as Lee's substitute grandparents, aunts and uncles, and Lee had been grateful for them, especially around the holidays. However, she'd missed that sense of connection inherent in family ties.

The Carruthers family was one of the Rivermont families who included Lee and Julia in their family life. Julia knew Police Chief Jack Carruthers from her work for the city, and Lee knew Casey Carruthers from school. The Carruthers matriarch, Mary, became one of Julia's closest friends. Mary became a second mother to Lee, someone in whom Lee confided during the times she and her mother were on the outs.

Julia, Jack and Mary had been surprised when Casey and Lee began to date in college. Growing up, they'd been close friends, and the parents hadn't thought they'd ever be interested in one another romantically. Inevitably, the families became even closer after Casey and Lee's wedding.

Then tragedy had struck. Mary Carruthers was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive form of pancreatic cancer. She'd fought a courageous battle, but one she'd eventually lost. To everyone's joy, she'd lived long enough to see the births of her granddaughter Penny and her grandson Paul.

Mary's death had sent Jack into a tailspin that had led to his early retirement as Rivermont police chief. For a year, he'd done nothing, just kept to himself and stayed around the house. Then one day, he'd made the unexpected announcement that he'd decided to start a security company. And he'd done just that. He'd named the firm Double P Security, after his grandchildren. To no one's surprise, Jack's firm prospered, and Jack slowly reclaimed his life.

Now, Lee was tempted to text her mother and find out where she was headed. But she decided not to, not wanting to put her mother at risk of breaking the law by reading an incoming text while she was driving. Part of Lee approved of the strict no cell phone use laws, while her more dangerous side missed the freewheeling days of anything goes with cell calls and texts.

Instead, she woke up her laptop on the kitchen counter and checked her email and then her Twitter feed. She had an email from her editor, gently inquiring about the progress on her latest book. Lee was tempted to delete the email, to pretend she hadn't received it. But her conscience got the better of her, and instead of deleting the message, she moved it to her pending folder so she could answer it later.

Her Twitter feed was filled with its usual eclectic assortment of messages. She was currently obsessed with the catastrophe of politics in the nation's capitol, and Tweet after Tweet updated her on the latest goings-on. She also had several messages from fans, encouraging her in her battle with writers' block. She'd shared her struggle in her blog, and getting support from her readers warmed her heart.

One Tweet in particular caught her attention. It was from Josh Walters, saying how pleased he was to meet her and Casey and saying he hoped they would be able to get together when he returned to Rivermont in a couple of weeks. She was surprised to hear from him, and forwarded the message to Casey's private email address. Casey was one of the few remaining dinosaurs who ignored Facebook, Twitter, all forms of social media. He grudgingly used email and texts, but only because Lee insisted he had to use them.

In the email, Lee said, "Look who I / we heard from -- Josh Walters." She considered, then ended the email with, "I'm looking forward to seeing him again." She sent the email to Casey, then started thinking about Josh Walters. She still had no idea where, when or even if she might have seen him before.

"Oh well," she said out loud. "Maybe it will come to me." She closed the laptop and poured herself another cup of coffee. Retrieving her cell phone from the charging station, she tapped in a quick text to her mother.

"Hi! Saw you leaving early this am. What's up?" She added a question mark emoji and sent the text, grinning at the whooshing sound it made. For some reason, she'd always enjoyed that sound.

For a few minutes, she stood at the kitchen counter looking out the window. The front lawn was looking good, green and lush. One of the neighborhood teenagers had a lawn cutting business, and he kept the yard in tip top shape. Casey had gladly surrendered his mowing duties to the kid and gladly paid the more than reasonable fee the kid charged. The Carruthers and Julia lived in a gated community perched high on the cliffs overlooking the Mississippi River. Off in the distance, she could see the walkway that snaked its way along the

top of the cliffs, offering a breathtaking view of the river below and the corresponding cliffs on the other side of the river. At night, the walkway was lighted, creating an enchanting visual display.

Finally, the idea that had been percolating in the back of her mind since last night took hold and she sprang into action. She went upstairs for a quick shower. Ten minutes later, she was putting on makeup and blow drying her hair. Dressed, she grabbed her phone, her iPad and a notepad and was downstairs. She left a note on the fridge telling Casey she was running errands in case he came home for lunch. She quickly filled the cat's food and water bowls, cleaned the litter box and was out the door.

In her car, she opened the garage door, backed out, shut the garage door, then pulled out her cell phone. Scrolling through her contacts, she found the name she was looking for and pressed the call button. A moment later, she said, "Yes, hello, this is Lee, Lee Carruthers, Jack's daughter-in-law."

The person on the other end of the line said, "Hi, Lee. This is Della. What can I do for you?"

"Hi Della. It's good to talk to you again. I wondered if Jack had a few minutes for me this morning. In about, say, half an hour?" Lee asked.

"Let me just check his schedule," Della said.

Lee could hear the clicking of computer keys, then Della was back on the line. "Lee, Jack can see you at 10, if that works for you."

"Definitely, Della. Thanks. See you at 10." Lee ended the call and looked at the time on the phone. She had an hour to kill. It would take half an hour to drive downtown to Jack's office. Just enough time to make a quick stop at the library.

Ten minutes later, Lee pulled into the parking lot of the main headquarters of the Rivermont Library, one of her favorite places. Inside, she headed for the research department. Workers there were familiar with Lee and her unusual research questions. As a mystery writer, she could come up with rather bizarre topics for research.

She stood by the research desk, waiting for someone to help her. After a few moments, a young woman walked up to Lee and gave her a high-five salute.

"Hey, girl, how are you?" Lee said, reaching across the narrow desk to hug the girl.

The girl grinned and said, "It's all good."

The girl, Samantha, looked nothing like the stereotypical research librarian. Samantha was currently going through an intense Goth phase, dressing in black and wearing heavy black eye make-up. She sported a burgundy streak in her dark hair and multiple body piercings with the requisite jewelry. Lee had been working with her for a couple of years, appreciating the girl's amazing research skills.

Today's research request was going to be a tricky one. Lee had come up with a cover story that she hoped would pass muster with Samantha.

"What can I do for you today, Lee?" Samantha asked.

Lee flashed a grin at the girl and said, "Let's step into your office." Lee motioned toward the cubicle that Samantha called home. The two women walked over to the cubicle, Samantha in front, with Lee trailing behind her. The research area was relatively deserted this morning, with Samantha the only staffer on hand.



Instead of sitting behind her desk, Samantha took one of the two guest chairs placed in front of the desk, and Lee took the other.

"You're going to love this request," Lee said, the grin back on her face. "I'm thinking about writing a mystery about a stalker. Casey and I attended a seminar on stalking last night, and the presenter and what I learned about the topic from him fascinated me. Out of curiosity, I did some Googling of him. And the funny thing is that I could only find ten years worth of information about him. It's as though he didn't exist until ten years ago."

"Hmmm," Samantha murmured. "There could be a few explanations for that." She stood up and went over to her desk and sat down in front of her computer. "What's his name?"

Lee hesitated before speaking, feeling a certain sense of betraying Samantha. But it was what it was. "His name is Josh Walters."

Lee heard the rapid clicking on the keyboard, then Samantha saying, "Hmmm," again.

Unable to mask her curiosity, Lee stood and walked over to stand behind Samantha. She looked at the computer screen over Samantha's shoulder and saw an unfamiliar interface. At the top of the screen was Josh Walters' name. Several photos were next to his name. She saw his date of birth and was surprised to see he was older than she'd thought, older than he looked. In fact, he was a couple of years older than her mother.

She was amazed to see the level of detail on the screen. The data revealed his addresses and jobs for the past ten years, along with information on his travels, both national and international. The screen listed his polling places and whether he voted. It also showed the property taxes he'd paid, the two parking tickets and three speeding tickets he'd contested and lost. Lee was perplexed at the data she was seeing. How on earth did Samantha have access to all of this?

She asked that question. "Sam, how do you have all this information?"

"Just between the two of us?" Sam said.

"Of course," Lee replied.

"I do computer coding on the side, mostly as a hobby although maybe someday I'll switch careers. Anyway I developed an aggregator program that can go out on the Internet and grab data from a variety of databases that the library subscribes to -- and I have to admit, some that it doesn't subscribe to. That's the part we have to keep just between ourselves."

Sam paused then continued. "What's really going on here?"

Lee hesitated, debating whether to stick to her original story or to tell the truth to Sam. She decided that since Sam had been so open with her, she would do the same.

"Well, I must admit I fudged a bit." Lee said in a sheepish tone. "Everything I told you was the truth. The part I left out is that the man looked so familiar to me. I think I've seen him before but for the life of me, I can't remember where or when. So there's some kind of personal angle here."

Sam threw her a look, and Lee bowed her head and said, "Sorry."

"Not to worry," Sam said. "But with me, the truth, nothing but the truth is always the best way to go."

"Sure, will do," Lee said.

"Now, let's talk about your fellow here. Like I said before, there are a few reasons why we're not seeing anything further back than ten years in the data about Josh Walters. The first, most obvious reason is that ten years ago, for whatever reason, the man changed his name."

Lee considered this, then said, "That would explain it. But why would someone change their name at the age of..." She looked at the dates on the computer screen and said, "At the age of 52. That doesn't make a lot of sense."

"No," Sam agreed, "but it happens. Now, the other reason for changing his name could be he's running from the law. Maybe he committed some crime and he's hiding out under another name."

"That makes sense also," Lee said. Then she gave Sam a wide grin and said, "You're pretty smart for a Goth chick."

Sam gave Lee a playful swat on the arm, then said, "Another reason for the name change might be witness protection. Maybe he witnessed some kind of crime and the authorities gave him a new identity." She turned back to the screen and clicked the mouse on one of the areas on the interface. A different screen appeared. At the top were the words, Associations and Correlations.

Lee leaned into the screen and stared at the data there. To her surprise, one of the fields said, Aliases and AKA. Lee assumed the AKA stood for also known as. There were two names listed in that field. The first one was Trevor March. The second was David Halsted.

She looked at Sam and asked, "What does this mean? Are those names that Josh Walters used at one time?"

Sam nodded and said, "Yeah, that's what it means. This is one of the screens that could get me in a boatload of trouble if anyone found out about it."

**Chapter 8**  
**Julia**  
**Tuesday Morning**  
**May 14**

Julia pulled her Lexus SUV into the parking garage across the street from the Double P Security building in downtown Rivermont. She'd called Jack Carruthers first thing this morning, asking if he had a few minutes to see her. He'd agreed and had offered to stop by her house on his way to the office but Julia said she'd rather meet at his office. They'd settled on 8 o'clock.

Julia crossed the street with the light. She was always scrupulously careful to obey the law, follow all rules, sometimes to a fault, according to her daughter. Inside the office building, she looked at the directory, searching for Double P Security. She'd only been to Jack's office one time, to attend the office opening party he'd thrown for the firm. She'd come with Casey and Lee and had followed along as they rode the elevator up to Jack's suite of offices. She hadn't paid any attention to its location. The directory indicated that Jack's offices were on the top floor. She rode the elevator up and got off into an open area. She remembered that Jack's offices were the only ones here on the top floor.

A receptionist sat at a long counter like desk in the reception area. When Julia walked toward her, the young woman came out from behind the desk and came over to Julia and held out a hand.

"Ms. Dennison, I presume?" the young woman said.

Julia reached out and shook the woman's hand with a smile and said, "That's me."

"Hello, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Della. Jack said to bring you on back to his office when you got here. Would you like coffee? Or tea perhaps?"

"Coffee would be wonderful. Black is fine," Julia said.

Della opened a double set of doors at the end of a hallway and stood aside while Julia walked in. Jack was sitting behind his desk, and he rose and walked over to greet Julia with a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"Della? Coffee?" Jack asked with a grin.

"Right away, boss," Della said.

"And don't call me boss," Jack said, a grin still on his face.

"Yes, sir, boss," Della replied and left the office.

"Good to see you, Julia," Jack said. "Let's sit over here at the table." He led the way to a small round conference table surrounded by four overstuffed, comfortable-looking chairs. The table was placed in front of a huge window that overlooked the city and the river beyond. Julia deliberately took a chair that placed her back to the outstanding view. She didn't want anything to distract her from her purpose.

Jack sat down across from Julia and took a small recorder from one of his jacket pockets and then a black leather notebook from another pocket and set them on the table in front of him.

"It's been awhile since I last saw you," Jack said. "I think it was Penny's birthday party."

"Yes, that's right," Julia said. "Well, you'll be seeing me again in a couple of weeks for Paul's party. Lee is planning one of those pizza extravaganzas at a video game center."

"Oh, great," Jack said, shaking his head in mock dismay.

Just then, Della came in carrying a tray with coffee and what looked to Julia like scones. Della set the tray down on the table next to Jack's recorder and notebook and asked, "Anything else, boss?"

Jack shook his head and grinned, "Thanks, Della."

The young woman nodded and left the office, closing the door behind her.

"Delightful girl," Julia said, picking up one of the cups of coffee and taking a sip.

Jack laughed and said, "Whatever you do, don't let her hear you call her a girl. She's very much a woman, at least in her own mind."

Each of them took a scone and set it on a napkin. For a few moments, they chewed and sipped in a companionable silence. They'd been close friends for years and had grieved together when Mary died. There were strong emotions between them, and for a while now, Julia had had the feeling that their relationship might grow into something more than friendship. But for now, she was satisfied to have Jack Carruthers as a very good friend.

Jack brushed the crumbs from the scone off his fingers and took one last drink of coffee, then said, "Now, tell me what I can do for you."

Julia thought for a moment, then said, "First, I need to make sure that anything I say to you will remain completely confidential."

Jack nodded as he reassured her, saying "Of course. That's the deal."

"Okay, because I'm going to tell you some things that hardly anyone knows, especially Lee. She's the one who must never learn what I'm about to tell you."

Jack frowned but didn't say anything. He didn't like what he was hearing. He loved his daughter-in-law dearly and didn't want to think he would be keeping secrets from her. But he'd keep an open mind. He'd see what was up with Julia and go from there.

"Thirty-two years ago," Julia began, "I was involved with a man who committed suicide, or so I thought at the time. Now I'm not so sure."

She told him about the stalking seminar Casey and Lee had attended the night before and about the picture on Lee's phone. "I know it's been more than 30 years," Julia said, "but I could swear it was Trevor, Trevor March."

"Tell me about the suicide," Jack said.

Julia explained about the river cruise, the death of the model Natalia, and the supposition that after killing Natalia, Trevor had jumped overboard. "His body was never recovered but his jacket with his business card case washed ashore. Art was convinced that Trevor had jumped off the yacht into the Potomac and that's what the authorities settled on."

"Art?" Jack asked. "Who is Art?"

Julia hesitated, then said, "Art Crowley."

"The Art Crowley?" Jack asked, a note of incredulity in his tone.

"The one and only," Julia confirmed. "Art and Trev were college buddies and then business partners. They had a really close friendship, and Art was devastated at Trev's death, or so I thought. If Trevor faked his death, Art absolutely had to be in on the plan."

"My God, Julia," Jack said, his voice cracking. "That's the man who's planning to run for president -- of the United States, no less. If he was involved in helping someone fake his death, that's a felony."

Julia stood up and began to pace around Jack's office. "I know, Jack. That's why I'm here. I didn't know what to do. You're the only person I could trust with this."

Jack stood up and walked over to where Julia was pacing. He gently took her arm and said, "Come, sit back down and let's talk this through."

Julia followed Jack back to the conference table, and they both sat down. Jack reached across the table and took Julia's hand. "Don't look so worried. We'll figure this out." Jack turned his head and shouted, "Della! More coffee!"

Julia started to laugh and said, "Jack, that was awful. Don't you have an intercom or something?"

"Yeah, but it's over on my desk, and I'm sitting here. Besides, Della is accustomed to my lack of manners."

Just then, the office door opened and Della came in carrying a tray with a pot of coffee on it. She set it down on the table, then turned to Julia and said, "Don't worry about his bad behavior. I'm used to it." She left the office, closing the door behind her.

Julia poured them each a cup of coffee, then turned to Jack and said, "Jack, there's something I have to tell you."

"Yes?" Jack said.

"It's about Lee." Julia stopped and took a sip of coffee. "This is really hard."

"Just say it," Jack told her.

**Chapter 9**  
**Lee**  
**Tuesday Morning**  
**May 14**

As Sam told her about the names that Josh Walters had used in the past, Lee automatically reached into her handbag to pull out one of the small, ubiquitous notebooks she kept at hand, along with a marker. She wrote down the two names Sam had provided -- Trevor March and David Halsted. Neither of the names were familiar to her.

Sam exited out of the computer screen she was so concerned about, then asked Lee, "So what are you going to do now?"

"Well, I'll do some digging on these two names, I guess." She paused for a moment, trying to decide whether to tell Sam about the appointment she'd scheduled with Jack Carruthers. Finally, she decided against it. Sam was so nervous about her extracurricular research activities that Lee didn't want to freak her out by telling her she was about to go meet with the former Rivermont chief of police.

Lee picked up her purse and briefcase and thanked Sam for her help.

"Let me know what you find out," Sam said. Then she offered, "I'd be glad to help, if you want."

"Thanks," Lee said. "I may take you up on that offer."

Lee left Sam's cubicle and headed toward the main entrance of the library. She hoped that nothing she had asked Sam to do would get the young woman in trouble. Sam had been a godsend to her, and Lee didn't want any harm to come to her.

Outside, Lee stood at the top of the broad stairs that led to the Rivermont library. She loved this place and had since early childhood. Walking down the steps of the library toward her car in the parking lot, Lee was swept away in memories of the part this place had played in her childhood. Julia had helped her daughter love books as much as she did. They paid weekly visits to the library and always left with stacks of books. Lee had learned to read early, and was reading at a fifth grade level when she entered kindergarten. The elementary school had wanted Lee to skip a grade but Julia had decided against it. She felt that Lee needed the social advantages of being with children of her own age. Julia had committed herself to providing Lee with any enriched schooling necessary.

Lee had started writing stories when she was about seven years old. Julia had encouraged her daughter's creativity and had become Lee's best audience. After awhile, Julia realized that Lee had real writing talent and had gently led her daughter in that direction. She signed Lee up for writing workshops and helped her enter her stories in contests for teen writers. To Julia's surprise, Lee had started writing what Julia considered "hard-boiled" thrillers. Julia wasn't sure how Lee had headed in that direction but accepted her daughter's interest and signed her up for a variety of forensic classes, in addition to her regular school classes.

When Lee reached the parking lot, she shook off her childhood memories and headed to her car. Glancing at her watch, she saw that it was quarter to 10, plenty of time to get to Jack's office, even if she walked. But she decided to drive the few blocks to the Double P Security building and save herself the walk back.

Lee was quite familiar with Jack's office building and his suite of offices. Off and on, she visited him and his tech guys for tutorials on the latest in cyber security information that she used in her thrillers. Jack jokingly threatened to charge her for the training time. Other times, he threatened to hire her as one of his staff members. Casey got a kick out of the relationship between his father and his wife and was glad they got along so well. Lee shared with Casey the tech ideas she picked up at Double P and Casey had found that knowledge helpful several times in cases he was working.

Lee pulled into the parking garage across the street from Double P Security. The garage was almost full, and she had to drive to the top level before she found an empty parking space. She grabbed her over-sized handbag, got out of the car and locked it. Her handbag was its usual heavy self, containing her iPad, a notebook and a bottle of water, in addition to her regular handbag contents of wallet, make-up and ever-present crossword puzzle book. She ran down the three flights of steps that led to the ground level of the garage. As she started to cross the street, a familiar-looking Lexus pulled out from the parking garage's exit down the block. For a moment, Lee thought the vehicle was her mother's, then decided she was mistaken. What would her mother be doing downtown?

In the lobby of Jack's office building, the doorman greeted her by name, and held the elevator door open for her. Lee liked the feeling of belonging that the doorman's recognition gave her. The sense of isolation that her writing life gave her was one of its drawbacks. Sometimes she missed the camaraderie of an office environment. No water cooler discussions and debates for her. She wondered if her frequent visits to Double P Security had more to do with being around other people than the actual information she garnered there.

Jack's assistant Della sat at her desk in the outer office, typing away at her computer. She looked up when the outer office door opened and broke into a broad smile when she saw Lee coming through the door. She stood up and walked over to give Lee a hug.

"It's been too long, girl!" she said. She stood back and took a long look at Lee. "You're looking good. What's up?"

"Same old, same old, Della. But my same old is the best. Casey's doing well, the kids are great. The only fly in the ointment is this datted writer's block I'm dealing with." Lee shook her head as she spoke the last words.

"Sorry to hear about the writer's block," Della said, giving Lee's arm a pat. "Jack's on the phone at the moment. Why don't you come back with me to the kitchen, and I'll get you a cup of coffee?"

"Sounds good to me," Lee agreed. She followed Della down a short hallway and into a small but charming kitchen area. Della motioned to one of the tables in the room, and Lee sat down while Della went over to the coffee maker. A minute later, Della brought two cups of coffee to the table. Della pointed to the creamer and sugar on the table, but Lee waved away the offer, saying that she took her coffee black.

Della joined Lee at the table and proceeded to doctor her coffee with copious amounts of creamer and sugar. "It's been too long since you've been here," Della said, then took a tentative sip of coffee.

"I know," Lee said. "I'll have to remedy that. I'm here to ask Jack's help on a research issue but I'll be back to do more of my tech snooping. How are the guys?" Lee asked, referring to the three technical analysts Jack employed.

"Same as ever," Della said. "They sit in that computer room for hours on end, staring at their computer monitors and speaking in an unintelligible language." She took another sip of coffee, then added, "Well, unintelligible to me, that is. I'm sure you and Jack understand what they're talking about."

"Sometimes," Lee said. "But then there are times when what they're saying goes right over my head. That's when I need Jack to translate. "

"How's your family?" Della asked.

"Good," Lee answered. "Everyone is really good. The kids are just as rambunctious as ever. My mom is still keeping an eye on them sometimes. It's a miracle that she can keep up with them."

"How is your mom?" Della asked.

Lee hesitated a moment before answering. There was an odd tone in Della's voice that Lee couldn't identify. "Um, Mom is doing well. She's still working part-time for the city, in addition to corralling my children."

"Hmm," Della said, "Good for her."

Again, Lee detected something off about Della but couldn't tell what it was.

Just then, Jack came into the kitchen. "Della, why didn't you tell me my favorite daughter-in-law was here?"

Lee stood and walked over to Jack and gave him a hug. "She just wanted to keep me all to herself. And by the way, if you've forgotten, I'm your only daughter-in-law."

Jack chuckled, then led Lee back to the table. He sat down between the two women, and Della asked if he wanted coffee.

"No, I'm coffee-ed out at the moment," Jack said.

"That's right," Della said. "I remember serving you and your last appointment quite a bit of coffee."

Lee thought she caught an odd look between Della and Jack but decided she must be imagining things.

Jack turned to Lee and said, "Want to bring your coffee to my office?"

Lee said yes and picked up her cup.

Jack turned to her and said, "Please go on in. I need to talk to Della for a moment."

Lee nodded and headed out of the kitchen and down the hall to Jack's office.

Jack turned to Della and said, "You didn't --"

Della interrupted with, "Of course not. I didn't mention that her mother just left. This business is all about confidential, secure things, you know." Della gave him a grin, then took her coffee and went back to the reception area. Jack shook his head but had an answering grin on his face. He should have known he could trust Della not to say anything about Julia's visit.

Jack went down the hall to his office, and as he entered, he closed the door behind him. Lee was standing at the windows, looking out over the city. Jack walked up beside her and said, "Good view, eh?"

"You bet. Casey says it's the reason you leased this space."



"My boy knows what he's talking about," Jack said. Then he added, "Come, sit down and tell me what I can do for you."

Lee walked over to Jack's conference table and sat down. Jack followed behind her and sat across the table from her.

Lee pulled her phone out of her purse, swiped through some photos till she found the one she wanted, then showed the photo to Jack. "This is a stalking expert named Josh Walters. Casey and I went to his seminar last night at City Hall."

Jack looked closely at the photo, then handed the phone back to Lee. "Casey told me you were both planning to go. He suggested I go also but I had another meeting."

Jack leaned back, waiting for Lee to explain why she had shown him the photo and what she was doing here. Long ago, he'd learned the power of listening, the power of silence. For whatever reason, people seemed to want to fill the silence, and Jack was always willing to let them do so.

Lee chuckled and said, "You're using your listening and filling the silence trick on me, aren't you?"

Jack laughed in return and said, "I should have known it wouldn't work on you. You're too smart for my mind games. So just tell me why you're here, and we'll get on with it."

"Well, I'm positive that I've seen this man somewhere before but for the life of me, I can't figure out where or when. Now, the troubling part is that online, I can only find a record of him 10 years back. Nothing before then. A friend who does research for me says there could be a couple of reasons for that. He could have changed his name to hide out from someone or something or he could have changed his name because he's in witness protection."

"Smart friend you've got there. Let me know if he or she is ever looking for a job. There's at least one other possibility. Maybe he just lived under the radar, not doing anything to get his name online. I know that might seem like a stretch but it does happen, you know," Jack said.

"I guess that's possible," Lee said. "But there's something else."

"And what would that be?" Jack asked.

Lee told him about the aliases or two other names that were linked to Josh Walters' name -- Trevor March and David Halsted.

Jack reached for a pad of paper and pen from the center of the conference table and asked Lee to spell the names and she wrote them down. He studied the names for a moment, then asked Lee, "Are either of those names familiar to you?"

Lee shook her head and said, "No, not familiar at all."

"And how did you get these names?" Jack asked.

Lee hesitated, then shook her head. "Jack, I can't tell you that. Just believe me that I got them from a trusted source and leave it at that."

Jack made a faint growling sound in his throat, and Lee knew he was not happy with her response. But she had to do what she had to do. She'd promised Sam to keep her out of this and keep her out she would.

Jack leaned back in his chair, steepled his fingers into a triangle and closed his eyes. He didn't like situations like this, where he wasn't privy to a full disclosure of information.

"Let me ask you this," Jack said, opening his eyes and leaning forward in his chair. "Have you talked to Casey about this?"

Lee nodded as she said, "Yes, sort of."

"Sort of?" Jack asked.

"He knows I think Josh Walters looks familiar to me. Although he doesn't look familiar to Casey. I also told Casey about my mother's reaction to Josh Walters' photo on my phone," Lee said, "Oh, I don't think I mentioned that to you."

"No, you certainly didn't. Tell me about it."

Lee sighed and paused a moment, gathering her thoughts together. This was harder and more complicated than she'd anticipated. She'd thought she'd come see Jack, give him a bit of information and then be on her merry way. But she was beginning to feel she was under interrogation, and she didn't much like the feeling.

She took a breath, then began. "Mom babysat last night while Casey and I went to the seminar. When we got home, I spent a few minutes with Mom, telling her about the seminar and then showing her a picture of Josh Walters. I could have sworn she had a reaction, surprise or shock or something like that, when she saw the picture. She turned pale but when I asked what was wrong, she said nothing was wrong. Then she asked me for a glass of water. When I came back with the water, she took a few sips, then high-tailed it out of there. And I do seriously mean high-tailed. She grabbed her things from the family room couch, then raced to the entry hall and grabbed her coat. By the time I caught up, she was out the front, calling back over her shoulder that she'd talk to me tomorrow -- that would be today."

"Hmmm," Jack said, then stood up and walked over to his desk. He leaned over and punched the intercom button. When Della answered, Jack said, "Della could you please bring in some coffee for Lee and me?"

Della murmured something Lee couldn't hear, then Jack came back to the conference table and sat down. He did his steepled fingers thing again, then said, "Lee, you might be making something out of nothing, you know."

Lee started to protest, then thought better of it. She'd come here for Jack's help, and part of that help might be advice to let this go. She thought a moment, then asked, "Is that what you think?"

Jack gave a half nod and said, "Maybe. Maybe not. Let's consider your options."

Just then, before Jack could continue, his office door opened. Della came in balancing the coffee tray on one hand. Lee found herself admiring the woman's dexterity. If it had been Lee doing the balancing, the tray would be on the floor by now.

Della placed the tray on the conference table, then slowly walked out of the room. Lee wondered if she'd been listening at the office door, then quickly rejected the thought. That wasn't Della's style. If she wanted to know something, she just came right out and asked. No sneaking around or beating around the bush for Della. The woman shut the door behind her, as Jack poured them each a cup of coffee.

"You were saying something about options?" Lee said, picking up the conversation where they'd left off.

"Well, the most obvious option is to just dismiss your suspicions, to just let it go. That's probably your best alternative. Chances are that Josh Walters happens to resemble someone you once met. So you could just forget about it," Jack said.

"And what are my other options?" Lee asked.

"Well, you could always question your mom, see if she really did have a reaction to the photo, see if she did know this man," Jack said.

"Are those my only options?" Lee said.

"I guess you could have me do some detective work, see what I could find out about this man," Jack said, reluctance obvious in his voice.

"Bingo!" had been Lee's response. "That's the option I was waiting for."

"Hmmm," had been Jack's response. "That's what I was afraid of. So you want me to check this guy out?"

"Yes, yes, I do," Lee replied. "That's what I want. Well, it doesn't have to be you. It probably won't be you but one of your guys. Could you do that for me? I'll pay, of course."

"Don't be ridiculous, Lee. You're not going to pay. But what you are going to do is to talk to Casey in more depth about this before you go any further. I know you say you mentioned it to him but please give him all the details, tell him every single thing you've told me and see what he thinks. Then get back to me."

Lee thought for a moment, trying to decide if she was offended that her father-in-law was telling her to check with her husband. But then she ignored that thought as she realized Jack was right. This was definitely something she needed Casey's input on. In fact, she should have talked to Casey first, before coming to see Jack.

Lee promised to talk to Casey right away, thanked Jack for his time and left his office. She said good-bye to Della on her way out, then hurried to her car. She sat in the car for a few minutes, thinking about what Jack had said and going over what Sam had found out for her. She wondered how Casey was going to react to all of this. She'd gotten the impression last night that he didn't think there was any reason for her to pursue her doubts about Josh Walters. Well, we'd see, she thought, as she started the car and prepared to drive out of the parking garage.

**Chapter 10**  
**Elena**  
**Tuesday Afternoon**  
**May 14**

Elena closed the door of the DC hotel room behind her and looked around. Her assistant had done an excellent job of booking a hotel room at the last minute. The room was large and bright, with a bank of windows across one wall. In front of the windows, a sofa and two chairs formed a comfortable-looking seating area. A king-sized bed was against one of the walls, opposite a built-in entertainment center that housed a large screen TV. A chest with a mini-bar was next to the TV and a desk sat against the fourth wall. The room had everything she could need.

She put her wheeled suitcase on the bench at the end of the bed and opened it to retrieve her laptop. She put the laptop on the desk and plugged it in. Then she took her clothes out of the suitcase and hung them in the nearby closet. From the mini-bar, she took a frosty bottle of water and drank half of it in one gulp. Flying always made her extremely thirsty. She wandered around the room, sipping at the rest of the water.

She'd left a voice mail for Art Crowley this morning while she was at the airport waiting to board the non-stop to DC. She'd told him she'd be in the city that afternoon and needed to see him on an urgent matter at his earliest convenience.

Elena smiled to herself as she thought about how Art might be reacting to her message. She was sure the words "urgent matter" would have him worrying and that's right where she wanted him. She walked over to the windows and looked out into the hotel courtyard. She'd told her assistant to book a room in a downtown hotel as close as possible to the sprawling Crowley Enterprises complex. Art had done quite well for himself over the years. His wealth was now in the billions and he regularly placed on the Forbes list of billionaires. Elena couldn't conceive of how that kind of wealth must feel. She and Doug had more than enough money for their every desire. What must it be like to know you could buy anything in the world you wanted? What must it feel like to have that kind of power?

Elena thought about the fact that Art Crowley was now using his immense wealth to buy himself a place in politics. Word on the street was that he was about to announce his run for his party's nomination for president. Well, we'll just see about that, she thought, satisfaction coursing through her.

Elena retrieved her cell phone from her jacket pocket and called Crowley's private number. After three rings, she heard his deep, rumbling voice.

"Well, Elena, my dear, are you in DC?" he asked.

"Yes, Art, that I am. When will you be able to come see me?" she said.

There was a slight hesitation before Crowley answered. "So that's the way it's going to be? You're going to summon me to appear?"

"That's only fitting, don't you think?" had been Elena's response.

Again, a hesitation, then a sigh, then, "All right. Where are you?"

Elena gave him the name of the hotel and her room number. Crowley said he'd be there within an hour. "I'll arrange to come in the back way." He hung up before Elena could respond.

Elena wondered why he wanted to come in the back way, then realized that he was already planning for his political future. Best to keep his previous relationships in the past, she thought.

She picked up the hotel phone and called room service, ordering scotch, wine and a selection of appetizers. Art had always been a heavy eater and drinker, and she had no reason to think that had changed over the years.

She went to the closet and selected the red silk dress she'd brought along and slipped it on. She knew she looked her sexy best in the dress and that was what she wanted. She got her make-up kit out of her overnight bag and headed into the bathroom for a complete re-do of her make-up. She was determined to show Art Crowley just how good a 62-year-old woman could look. Much better than a man of 65 or 66 -- she never could remember his exact age.

Half an hour later, make-up done, she answered the knock on her hotel room door and let in the waiter with her room service order. She had him place the cart next to the seating area by the windows. She gave him a generous tip and asked him to put the Do Not Disturb sign on the door on his way out.

Looking down at the delicious-looking spread of appetizers, she selected an oversized shrimp and popped it into her mouth, careful not to mess up her lipstick. She poured herself a stiff scotch on the rocks and sipped at it as she roamed around the room. The clock on the wall indicated that Art was late. It had been over an hour since they spoke on the phone. But that was to be expected from Art Crowley. He marched to his own drum, with no thought of anyone but himself. That was probably an appropriate attribute for a presidential candidate, she mused.

Elena shuddered as she considered Art as president. It would be a monumental disaster. That was the strongest motivation she had for being here. She planned to threaten Art with exposure of his deepest, darkest secrets unless he abandoned his plan to run for president.

She heard the buzzing of her cell phone and looked around the room, trying to locate the phone. She finally found it on the bathroom counter where she'd set it while applying her make-up. It was Doug calling. She considered, then let the call go to voice mail. At the moment, she was too revved up to talk sensibly to her husband. She had a mission here, and she didn't want to let anything interfere with what she intended to do.

When she'd heard the first rumors about Art's presidential ambitions, she'd dismissed the possibility that he'd actually run. He had too many vile, corrupt events in his past. He'd never pass the necessary vetting for a candidate. Then she'd started to hear that to Art, none of his past indiscretions mattered. What mattered was his seeming ability to capture the hearts and minds of his party members.

So she'd had to face the real possibility that he'd run. And as the rumors and interest grew about his possible candidacy, she was confronted by another real possibility -- that he'd actually win his party's nomination. This was unthinkable. But until now, Elena hadn't any real ammunition she could use against Art. But if Trevor March was somehow about to surface from his long disappearance, there was real proof of Art's dreadful misdeeds.

Her phone pinged, indicating that Doug had left a voice mail for her. She listened to the message, and it brought tears to her eyes. It was so wonderful to be loved by a man like Doug. She'd never expected to have the love of a good man. And here, in the twilight of her life, she had the best of the best. She saved the voice mail, then put the phone in a pocket of the red silk dress.

Where was Art? He was now almost an hour late. What nerve the man had! Elena thought about calling him again but decided against it. She didn't want him to know how anxious she was about their meeting.

What would she do if Art blew her off? If he ignored her threats? Well, he wasn't going to do that, Elena thought. In this particular situation, I have the power. For a moment, she wondered whether she should be afraid of Art and what he might do. But before leaving Boulder, she'd taken certain precautions. She'd composed a letter to her attorney, providing the details of Art's affair with Natalia, her death, the blaming of her death on Trevor March, and Trevor's supposed suicide. She'd put the letter in an envelope with the message, "To be opened only in the event of my death." Fairly dramatic of her, but probably sufficient to keep her safe from Art's inevitable wrath. She'd addressed a second envelope to her attorney and mailed the letter at the airport post office.

She heard a loud knock at the hotel room door and walked over to look out the peephole. Standing there at the door were three men. One of them was Art Crowley. The other two looked like muscle. Art was famous for his constant bodyguards and that's who Elena assumed the other two men were.

Elena opened the door and stood aside for the men to come in. One of the bodyguards preceded Crowley and the other followed behind him. When Art entered the room he stopped in front of Elena and looked her up and down, head to toe, then nodded and broke into a wide grin.

"God, girl! You look like a million dollars!" He laughed, then said, "I would assume it cost more than that for you to look this good at your age."

"Always a gentleman, eh, Art?" Elena said, shaking her head, but reaching out to hug him. They stood there for a moment, looking at one another. Then Art walked toward the center of the room and called to his men, "Guys, it's all right. No need to search anymore. You can wait out in the hall."

Silently, the two men left the room, closing the door softly behind them. Elena took the opportunity to take a good look at Art. She hadn't seen him in person for years but had regularly kept up with his activities through various newspaper and magazine articles.

He hadn't aged as well as she and Julia had. He'd put on a little too much weight over the years and looked puffy and slightly bloated. He'd evidently had a hair-weave job, and it was a good one so it must have been expensive. His face was unlined, evidence of a Botox regime or a face lift, or maybe both. He was dressed in a suit that looked outrageously expensive. His red silk tie looked like a Hermes, with a price tag of several thousand dollars.

All in all, though, Crowley looked better than she'd expected, Elena thought. She told him so, in those exact words. "Well, Art, with all due respect and no offense intended, you look better than I expected."

Art winced and placed his hand over his heart. "You wound me, my dear. Your tongue is as sharp as ever."

"You'd better believe it," Elena said. "Come over here and have a drink and something to eat."

She headed to the room service cart by the seating area and poured herself another generous Scotch. She stood nearby while Art poured himself an even more generous Scotch on the rocks. Art walked over and set his drink down on the coffee table in the seating area and came back to the room service cart. He picked up one of the china plates and filled it with shrimp, caviar, and tiny sandwiches. Then he laughed loudly and took several pigs in a blanket from a serving tray. He popped one in his mouth and closed his eyes in pleasure.

"You remembered how I love these little devils," Art said.

"So I did, so I did," Elena said. Obviously, the years hadn't dulled Art's appetites.

She too put her drink on the coffee table, and came back to the room service cart. She put a few shrimp on a plate, doused them with cocktail sauce, and went to sit on the couch. Art joined her, sitting closer to her than she wished. She was tempted to move to one of the two chairs facing the couch, but managed to restrain herself. Art could interpret moving as a sign of weakness on her part, and she didn't want that.

"Now, what's this all about, my dear," Art said, his mouth full of pig-in-a-blanket.

Before Elena answered, she took a sip of her Scotch. She wanted to lash out at Art, tell him he was as much a pig as the appetizer he was eating. But she managed to rein in her anger and give him a smile.

"I've heard rumblings about your possible candidacy, your potential run for the presidential nomination." Elena kept her tone light and friendly. She wasn't ready yet to let Art know how she really felt about him. All these years, her hatred of him had kept building, and he hadn't a clue.

Art drained his drink and stood. "And what do you think about that?" he asked as he headed to the room service cart and poured another Scotch.

"It's an interesting possibility," Elena answered, keeping her tone noncommittal.

"A possibility that you could support?" Art asked.

Deciding the time had come to reveal her true feelings, Elena said, "No, Art. Definitely not something I could support."

Art came back to the seating area but this time sat in one of the chairs opposite the couch rather than next to Elena. He took a sip of his drink, staring at Elena over the rim of the glass, but not responding to her statement.

The two sat there, staring and glaring at one another. Finally, Art said, "That surprises me, my dear. I would have thought that I could depend on your support, based on what we once meant to each other."

Elena snorted, saying, "We never meant anything to each other. It was nothing but a sexual hook-up and not a very satisfying one at that."

At her harsh words, Art slammed his glass down on the coffee table and stood. "We're done here," he declared and turned toward the door.

Elena leaned back on the sofa and announced in a soft voice, "So, I heard that Trevor March is alive."

Art halted on the way to the door and turned around to look at Elena. "What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. After all these years, your little scheme is coming back to bite you in the butt."

Art walked over to the sofa and stood looming over Elena. "I don't know what you think you know," he said, "but Trevor March drowned more than 30 years ago."

"Bull shit," Elena said softly, her tone belying the crassness of her comment.

"What makes you think Trevor is alive?" Art asked, rage making his voice gravelly.

Elena reached in the pocket of her red silk dress and drew out her cell phone. She swiped through the photos till she found the one she was looking for.

She reached up and handed the phone to the looming Art. "This!" she declared. Art grabbed the phone out of her hand and stared down at the photo. The blood drained from his face.

"Where did you get this?" Art demanded, his voice a growl. He shoved the phone in Elena's face, then threw it on the floor.

Elena shrieked at him, then bent down and picked her phone off the floor. She waved the phone in his face, and yelled, "You broke the screen, you animal!"

Art waved his arm at Elena, as if to say, "Who cares!" He turned and began to pace around the room. Elena stared after him, not sure what to expect from the man. She was beginning to think this whole confrontation was a colossal misjudgment on her part. Why had she closeted herself alone in a room with someone she considered a monster?

Finally, Art walked over and stood in front of Elena, seemingly having regained a semblance of control. "Where did you get that photo?"

Elena took a deep breath and explained. "Julia Dennison texted it to me last night. Her daughter attended a seminar presented by this man. For some unknown reason, the daughter thought the man -- his name is Josh Walters -- looked familiar. She showed the photo to Julia and somehow Julia got a copy of it, I think without her daughter knowing. Julia was convinced it was Trevor March, and she sent the photo to me to see what I thought. And I agreed with her -- it is Trevor."

"Oh, for God's sake," Art said, "Trevor drowned. You know he drowned. They found his jacket and his business card case washed up on that sandbar in the river."

"But they never found his body," Elena said. She held up her phone with the cracked screen and waved it in Art's face. "And this Josh Walters looks exactly like Trevor March, 30 years later."

"You are so full of it!" Art muttered under his breath. "Tell me about this Walters fellow."

Elena told him what she knew, what little Julia had told her about how Josh Walters went around delivering seminars on the topic of stalking.

"Evidently, he's a professor in the criminology department at some college in the Pacific Northwest, near the Canadian border or somewhere like that. He's developed a reputation for being an expert on stalking. Julia's daughter is married to a police detective, and they attended one of these stalking seminars. And like I said, the daughter took a picture of the presenter, and here we are."

Art sat down in one of the chairs and pulled out his phone. "What's that name again? John Walters?" he asked.

"No, not John Walters. Josh Walters," Elena corrected.

Art tapped on the keyboard on his phone, making notes, Elena thought. "Where in Washington?" Art asked.

"I don't know. Look him up." Irritation was evident in Elena's tone.



Art stood, standing toe to toe with Elena. He glowered at her but didn't say a word. He strode out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Elena stood there, wondering what she had set in motion. For a moment, she thought about running after Art, telling him that she intended to forget the whole thing, that he should do the same. But she knew that wouldn't work. Now that she'd started Art down this path, he wouldn't quit until he'd found the man. Would he find Josh Walters or would he find Trevor March? And were they truly the same man?

**Chapter 11**  
**Julia**  
**Tuesday Evening**  
**May 14**

Late on Tuesday evening, Julia returned home from visiting her mother in the memory care facility. She closed the garage door and walked from the garage into her kitchen. She appreciated the warm welcome she felt whenever she entered her home. She'd lived here almost the whole time since her coming back from DC 30 plus years ago. When she'd first returned home, pregnant with Lee, she'd stayed with her mother in a small apartment in the city. After the baby was born, Julia had started looking for a house. She'd found the perfect one in a gated community on the outskirts of Rivermont, close to a state park and on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi. Using the generous agency bonus / severance Matt Witticomb had given her, she'd made a down payment on the house, an appealing four bedroom two-story with the requisite two-car garage, fireplace, fenced yard and various nooks and crannies through out the house that gave it character and appeal.

She'd begged her mother to come live with her and the baby and had received an adamant no to her request. Despite her mother's firmness, Julia had continued to chip away at her mother's determination to remain independent and on her own. It took two years for Julia to wear down Patricia Melton's resolute insistence that she didn't intend to live with her daughter.

It had been baby Lee's overwhelming charm that had eventually convinced her grandmother to move in with Lee and Julia. The combining of households had worked out well for Patricia and Julia. But the greatest beneficiary had been Lee. She grew up surrounded by a loving mother and a doting grandmother. She'd missed having a father in her life but had never lacked for love.

Patricia had cared for Lee when Julia went to work part-time for the city of Rivermont, an arrangement that satisfied Julia's need for mental stimulation and Patricia's desire to be useful.

Two years ago, to Julia's distress, her mother started to have memory issues. Their family doctor had confirmed Julia's worst fears -- Patricia was showing early signs of Alzheimer's. At first, caring for Patricia at home had been manageable. But after a year or so, it had become more than Julia could handle, even with a daily visit from a nurse. Julia had been forced to make the heart-wrenching decision for her mother to move into an assisted living facility. Patricia's condition had been slowly deteriorating, although she still recognized Julia when she made her daily visits. And she sometimes recognized her granddaughter Lee. But she no longer knew who Penny and Paul were so Lee had stopped bringing the children along on her visits.

As she often did, Julia had brought dinner to the nursing home to share with her mother. But Patricia had refused to eat, claiming that the food was poisoned. Julia had eaten her dinner, trying to convince her mother she was mistaken, that the food was fine. But it was hopeless. Patricia wouldn't touch a bite of the food. Julia had fought off tears, not wanting to upset her mother. It broke Julia's heart to see her mother like this, to have her life destroyed like this.

As Julia was kissing her mother good-bye, Patricia looked into Julia's eyes, a concerned look on her face. Then Patricia spoke in a clear, coherent voice. "You know, sweetie, you're really going to have to tell Lee the truth about her father."

Julia stepped back, shocked. What did her mother mean? What did her mother know? Julia bent down, put an arm around Patricia and asked, "What do you mean, Mom?"

But Patricia started to hum, her one moment of clarity evidently gone.

Now, in her kitchen, Julia poured herself a glass of wine and took it into the living room. She sat on one of the couches, in the dark. The only light in the room came from a night light near the front door. The house was quiet except for the slight whooshing sound of the ceiling fan. As she sat there sipping her wine, her tabby cat Bouncer jumped up on her lap, almost knocking the glass of wine out of her hand.

She steadied the wineglass, then began to rub Bouncer's back. He was getting old, poor fellow, nearing his 13th birthday. Bouncer had been a gift to her from Lee on the occasion of her leaving for college. Lee hadn't wanted her mother to be too lonely without her and thought a cat might fill the emptiness. Surprisingly enough, Bouncer had done exactly that.

Finished with her wine, Julia set the glass on an end table and gently lifted Bouncer to the floor. She felt in her pocket for her cell phone but it wasn't there. Then she remembered she'd turned it off and put it in her purse when she went to the nursing home to visit her mother.

She went into the kitchen and retrieved the phone from her purse. She turned it on and watched as message after message appeared on the screen: missed calls, voice mails and texts. She smiled and shook her head at the stream of communications. She'd only been incommunicado for about four hours and here she was inundated with a mass of messages.

She scrolled through the messages, checking to see if any of them were time-sensitive. She stopped when she reached a text from Elena Estes. It was in all caps and started out with the word URGENT!

Julia walked over to the kitchen counter and sat on one of the high stools there. She pulled her reading glasses out of her jacket pocket and began to read Elena's text.

"URGENT! CALL ME AS SOON AS YOU GET THIS. I TRIED CALLING YOU BUT IT WENT STRAIGHT TO VOICE MAIL."

Julia's heart began to pound as she scrolled through the contacts on her phone till she reached Elena's number. She tapped the number and waited as the phone rang. At first, when there was no answer, Julia thought the call was going to voice mail. But then she heard a breathless voice say, "At last! Where have you been? I've been trying to reach you for hours!"

"Well, hello to you, too," Julia said, a bit of irony in her voice.

"Hello. Sorry! It's just that something horrible is going on, and I need to talk to you," Elena said.

"What is it?" Julia asked, concern now in her voice.

"It's this Trevor March and Art Crowley situation. I saw Art today," Elena answered.

"You saw Art?" Julia said, disbelief evident in her tone.

"Yes, I flew to DC to see Art. I called him and arranged for him to meet me at my hotel. It was horrendous. That man is evil through and through. He's sticking to his story that Trev drowned. He told me we're crazy to think that Josh Walters is Trevor March, reincarnated or whatever."

"Tell me everything," Julia said.

"I will. But I need you to come to DC. We have to confront Art and get to the bottom of this."

Julia interrupted Elena, saying, "I can't come to DC."

"Of course you can. I'll arrange a flight for you, and you can stay here in the hotel with me. Jules, this is serious. This idiot man is going to run for president. We have to stop him." Elena stopped for a moment, then continued. "He's a murderer and worse. All along, I thought he was the one who killed that model. I think Art killed her and somehow convinced Trev to fake his death so Art could blame the model's death on him."

"Elena, that's a preposterous scenario. Why on earth would Trev agree to something like that?"

"Well, I think that Art had something on Trevor. Or Trevor owed him for something. I don't know. It probably doesn't matter what it was. What's important is that I'm sure Art killed the model, then convinced Trev to pretend to commit suicide and take the blame for the murder," Elena said.

"So where has Trevor been all these years?" Julia asked.

"I don't know," Elena answered slowly. "But I suppose we could hire an investigator to find the answer to that question."

For a moment, Julia didn't say anything. Then she said, "Well, actually I've started the ball rolling in that direction."

"What?" Elena asked. "What are you talking about?"

"My daughter's father-in-law is the former police chief of Rivermont who now owns a security firm that also specializes in investigations. I met with him this morning and asked him to see what he could find out about Trevor March."

"Why didn't you tell me that at the beginning of this call?" Elena demanded.

"You haven't really given me much of a chance to say anything," Julia said.

"Sorry," Elena said. "I'm just beyond upset about this. Tell me about your meeting with the investigator."

"His name is Jack Carruthers, and I've known him for almost 20 years. I gave him all the information I had, and he promised to look into it right away."

"Did you tell him about Art?"

There was a brief silence before Julia answered. "Yes, yes, I did. I felt I had to. I'm with you on this. I now think Art killed Natalia. At the time, I just bought the story everyone did. That Trev had accidentally killed the woman, then committed suicide out of guilt and remorse."

For a moment, both women were silent, then Elena spoke. "You know, there's no statute of limitations on murder. If we can find Trev and get him to tell what happened, we might be able to ensure that Art gets what he deserves. And make sure he doesn't get within spitting distance of the Oval Office."

"Elena, you don't really think he has a chance at that, do you?"

"I'm afraid I do. And that's what we have to stop. And our first step is to keep him from running for the Senate in Virginia. Now, let's talk about your trip to DC."

"But..." Julia began but was interrupted by Elena.

"No protests, girl. I'll handle everything."

**Chapter 12**  
**Jack and Casey**  
**Tuesday Evening**  
**May 14**

Casey packed up his laptop and was just about to head home from the police station when his personal phone vibrated in his pants pocket. He pulled the phone out and was pleasantly surprised to see that it was his Dad calling. The two of them were always so busy that their conversations were few and far between.

"Pop! How are you doing?" Casey said into the phone.

"Good, son. I'm good. How about you?" Jack Carruthers asked his son.

"I'm good, too," Casey replied. "I'm glad to hear from you. It's been awhile."

"I know," Jack said. "Things have been really busy here. Listen, Case, there's something important I need to discuss with you. By any chance, could you swing by here on your way home tonight?"

Casey considered for a moment, then said, "Sure, Pop. I don't have anything going on. What's this about?" he asked.

"I'd rather wait till you get here," Jack said. "How long do you think it will be?"

"I was just heading out so it'll be just a few minutes. Okay for me to park in one of your reserved spots?"

Jack chuckled and said, "Perfectly all right. You're connected to the boss."

Fifteen minutes later, Casey was sitting in the break room at Double P Security, having coffee with his Dad.

"I shouldn't be drinking this coffee," Jack said. "It will probably keep me up half the night. Getting old is the pits."

"Pop, you're the farthest thing from old. You can still beat my butt on the basketball court."

"That I can, my boy. Well, maybe I'm just aging gracefully, or some such nonsense," Jack said.

"Now, what is it you wanted to discuss with me," Casey asked, then took a drink of coffee.

Jack cleared his throat and said, "It's sort of, umm, delicate."

Casey hooted with laughter. "Pop, I don't think I've ever heard you use the word delicate in your life. What's going on?"

Jack grinned and said, "Well, maybe confidential would have been a better word. I need to get something straight between us before I get to the heart of the matter."

Casey looked at his father, wondering what this was all about. Usually, his dad was as straightforward and direct as they came. No beating around the bush for Jack Carruthers.

"Casey, you know you're going to inherit the business..."

Casey interrupted with, "Whoa, Pop, what's going on here? Are you sick? Is something wrong with you?"

"No, no, not at all. Sorry to be so confusing. I'm fine. What I'm saying is that your name is already on the business as a silent partner. So you'll keep confidential anything I tell you about a client or clients, right?"

Casey considered for a moment, then said slowly, "Right, right." Then he added, "Except if it pertains to a crime or a criminal. That I would have to handle as part of my real job on the force."

Jack rolled his eyes at his son and said, "Obviously. Okay, now that we have the confidentiality thing settled, hold on to your hat. You're not going to believe what I'm about to tell you."

"Okay, shoot," Casey said, starting to feel concerned about what he was about to hear.

"This morning, I got a call from Julia, asking to see me first thing. I didn't have anything scheduled, so I said, sure, come on down."

"What did she want?" Casey asked.

"Well, I'll tell you that in a moment. First, let me tell you that an hour later, Lee was here in my office."

"What?" Casey said. "My Lee?"

"Yes, your Lee. And your mother-in-law and your wife were both here about the same subject." Jack said, shaking his head.

"What subject?" Casey asked.

"They both, separately, I might say, and unbeknownst to one another, wanted me to investigate the same man."

"What man? Come on, Pop. Quit dragging this out. Spill the whole thing." Casey's impatience was palpable.

"They both wanted me to investigate a man named Josh Walters..."

Casey interrupted with "That makes no sense! Why would they want Josh Walters investigated?"

"They both had their reasons, and I can see why," Jack said.

"Tell me what they told you," Casey said.

"Well, Lee told me about the seminar you two attended last night, put on by Josh Walters. Lee said he looked so familiar to her but she couldn't figure out where she'd seen or met him before. The interesting part is that she evidently has someone who does research for her check him out. They discovered that he went by two prior names, Trevor March and David Halsted." Jack paused, as if to allow his son time to absorb this information.

"Yeah, Lee works with someone at the library who is an excellent researcher."

"Hmm," Jack said. "So, I told Lee to talk to you about all of this. I really didn't feel comfortable working on this without your knowledge. I think she understood my concerns, and she said she'd talk to you and then get back to me. I didn't tell her that her mother had been here talking to me about the same man. And I didn't follow up with Julia to tell her about Lee's visit. I'm keeping those two things separate. But I felt I had to talk to you about this."

"Tell me about Julia's visit," Casey said. "Lee told me she showed Julia a picture of Josh Walters last night. She seemed to think Julia knew him or had some kind of reaction to the picture."

"Yes, Lee told me that. Julia's visit is a little more problematic. I don't feel comfortable telling you everything without getting her permission first."

Casey stared at his father and said, "You've got to be kidding. You won't tell me about Julia's visit?"

"Sorry, son. The things Julia shared with me are very personal, and she has to be the one to decide if I can share them with you or anyone."

Casey considered his father's words for a moment, then nodded his head. "I understand that," he said. "I'll talk to Lee and then maybe the two of us can talk to Julia together."

"That sounds like a plan, son," Jack said. The two men stood and walked out of the break room together.

Half an hour later, Casey pulled into his driveway. He'd called Lee on his way home to tell her he'd be home soon. She'd told him she needed to talk to him that evening and he'd said, "Sure." He hadn't let on that he knew what she wanted to discuss. The evening passed quickly. He'd grilled hot dogs for Penny and Paul and steak for Lee and himself. The kids had played in the backyard while he grilled, and Lee set the table outside on their covered patio for dinner. Lee had phoned her mother to invite her over for dinner but the call had gone straight to voice mail. Casey was glad his mother-in-law hadn't joined them. He would have felt uncomfortable knowing what he knew and not being able to ask Julia what the hell was going on.

It was Casey's turn to corral Penny and Paul into bed after their baths. They'd started a new tradition with reading bedtime stories where the kids took turns reading the books rather than Lee and Casey doing the reading. Tonight it was Paul's turn to choose the book and do the reading. His son, a budding meteorologist, had chosen his latest favorite book from his school's reading club, *Storms*. Paul was fascinated with tornadoes, hurricanes, lightning, thunder, all the things that scared his older sister.

Once again, Penny buried her head under the covers while Paul read about devastating storms in his usual theatrical tones. She only emerged when Paul intoned, "The End."

Lee came into Penny's room on cue, tucking her daughter in bed, and kissing her. Casey had kissed Penny also, then the three of them went to Paul's room to perform the same ritual.

Downstairs, Lee put her arms around Casey and said, "You wanted to talk?"

"Yes, yes, I do. Let's go out on the patio. I'll light the Tiki torches."

A few minutes later, they were sitting close to each other on the porch swing, staring at the flames of the Tiki torches surrounding the patio. Lee started to say something but instead, pulled her phone out of her pocket. She read the text, then handed her phone to Casey for him to read.

"This makes no sense," she said. Casey read the text to himself, then read it out loud. "Lee: Something has come up and I have to go out of town for a bit. Sorry to leave you in the lurch. I'll be in touch. Love, Mom."

"What the hell?" Casey demanded.

"I know," Lee agreed. This was not like her mother at all. Julia was a stickler for always letting Lee and Casey know where she was and what she was doing. This message from her was doing anything but that. Lee stood up and began to pace around the patio. Casey waited a couple of minutes, then said, "Come sit back down. There 's something we have to talk about."

"I know," Lee said. "I have something I have to tell you."

"Let me go first," Casey said. "I think things will make more sense that way."

Lee gave his a quizzical look, then said a tentative "Okay."

"Dad called me at the end of the day today and asked me to come by his office. He said he had something he wanted to talk to me about."

"I was going to tell you everything," Lee began, only to be interrupted by Casey.

"I know, I know," Casey assured her. "But like I said, it will make more sense if I tell it. What Dad said is that both you and your mother came to see him this morning, about the same man, it seems. Josh Walters."

"What are you talking about? Why would Mom go to see Jack about Josh Walters? That makes no sense."

"Maybe, maybe not," Casey said. "Here's the thing. Dad wouldn't tell me anything about your mother's visit, other than that she wanted him to investigate Josh Walters. Dad said your mother confided some personal things to him, and he didn't feel comfortable telling me -- or you, for that matter -- what they were without your mother's consent."

"Personal things?" Lee said. "What personal things could Mom have confided in him? This makes absolutely no sense." She pulled her phone out of her pocket and tapped in a call to her mother. When voice mail picked up, Lee said, "Mom, call me as soon as you get this message. It's an emergency."

Casey stared at his wife. When she ended the call, he said, "Lee, this isn't an emergency. That's not a card you should be playing."

"To me, it is an emergency. My mother takes off to God knows where. Then it turns out she knows something about this shady character..." her voice trailed off.

Casey picked up on the shady character reference and said, "Dad told me your researcher found two other names that Josh Walters had been using."

"Yes," Lee agreed. "Trevor March and David Halsted. And so much for the confidentiality factor of Double P Security."

"Dad dealt with that. He's decided that I'm part of the firm and privy to any and all client information," Casey said. Lee could tell from the tone of Casey's voice that he didn't necessarily agree with Jack Carruthers' disregard of client confidentiality.



"Well, whatever," Lee said. "I went to my researcher and then your Dad out of curiosity. But this is more than something to be curious about. How in the world is my mother involved?"

"I don't have a clue," Casey said, shaking his head. "I wish she'd return your call and give us some answers."

Lee looked down at her phone and began swiping through apps till she found Wher R U. She tapped around the app until she located her mother's whereabouts. Finally, she grunted and handed the phone to Casey. "Look at that," she said.

Casey looked down at the app, trying to figure out what he was seeing. He seldom used the Wher R U app, and it took a moment to orient himself to it. Then he exclaimed, "What the hell?"

**Chapter 13**  
**Julia and Elena**  
**Wednesday**  
**May 15**

Julia stood in the baggage claim area of Dulles, looking around for Elena. They'd arranged to meet at the carousel for Julia's flight but Elena was nowhere in sight. Julia began to pace back and forth, wondering where her friend was. When the luggage began to appear on the designated carousel, Julia walked over to retrieve her small, wheeled suitcase. She'd packed lightly, expecting to only spend a day or two in DC. As she hefted the bag off the carousel, she felt a hand on her arm. She turned, expecting to see Elena standing there but instead saw a man wearing what appeared to be a livery uniform.

"Ms. Dennison?" the man said.

Julia nodded and said, "Yes, I'm Ms. Dennison."

"Ms. Estes is waiting for you in the limo."

"She was supposed to meet me here," Julia said, puzzled as to why Elena had sent an emissary.

"Yes, ma'am," the man said. "But she was feeling a bit lightheaded and preferred to wait in the car."

Julia nodded again, and said, "I see." She pulled her phone out of her jacket pocket and started to call Elena. "Let me just check with her," Julia said.

The man took Julia's suitcase from her and started toward the exit, saying, "That won't be necessary. She's just outside the door."

For a few moments, Julia stood there motionless, at a loss, unsure what to do. Then, she capitulated and followed after the driver. Outside, a long black stretch limousine was parked next to the exit door. The driver had the trunk open and was putting Julia's suitcase inside. As she approached the vehicle, he slammed the trunk lid, then came around the car and opened the back door nearest Julia. She looked around, then got into the car. The driver walked around the front of the car and got in. A moment later, he locked the doors and sped off, almost hitting another car ahead of him.

Inside the limo, Julia looked around for her friend but the car was empty except for herself and the driver up front. She began to panic. She moved toward the front of the passenger area and knocked on the glass partition that separated her from the driver. A voice came over the intercom, saying, "Yes, ma'am?"

"Where's Ms. Estes? Why isn't she back here?" Julia's voice was shaky despite her effort to steady it.

"We've had a change of plans, Ms. Dennison. Ms. Estes is waiting for you at another location."

"Stop the car," Julia demanded. "I want to get out."

"I'm afraid that won't be possible," came the voice over the intercom.

Julia reached for the door handle of the nearest door and tried to open the door but nothing happened. She moved across the seat to another one of the doors with the same result.

Once again, she moved to the partition and pounded on the glass. "Let me out of here!" she insisted.

"Please, ma'am, just sit back and be patient. Everything will be fine."

As Julia sat on the edge of the limo's broad back seat, she felt the vibration of her cell phone in her jacket pocket. She felt a rush of relief when she saw Elena's name appear on the phone screen. She said a breathless hello and then before Elena could speak, she demanded, "What the hell is going on?"

"Calm down, Jules. Everything is all right." Elena's voice faded away, and Julia looked at the phone to see if the call had dropped. But it still appeared to be connected to Elena's cell phone.

"Elena, I can't hear you. Can you speak louder?"

"I think we have a bad connection. It doesn't matter. I'll see you soon. The driver will bring you to Art's estate, and we can catch up then."

"What are you talking about? What do you mean, Art's estate?"

But there was no answer. "Elena? Are you there?" No sound came from the phone. Julia leaned back in the seat, furious. What was going on here? She felt as though she'd been adducted. She was tempted to call 911 and report the driver. But then she reconsidered. She'd give Elena a chance to explain what she was involved in. Because Julia was convinced Elena was involved in something.

Julia gritted her teeth at the thought of seeing Art Crowley again. She hated the man but also feared him. His wealth and political clout gave him an unbelievable amount of power. And she had no idea how to deal with that kind of power.

She looked out the window and saw they were getting on a highway. That gave her an idea. At least she could try to figure where Art Crowley's estate was located. She did a Google search and found the location immediately. Evidently Art's estate was well known in the DC area. It was located about 20 minutes outside the city and seemed to cover an enormous amount of land. The search results included photos of the mansion and the grounds. It looked more like a castle than a house. Leave it to Art to build a monument to himself.

Julia took a deep breath and tried to quiet her racing heart. Her mind was going a mile a minute, and she felt lost in a jumble of thoughts. She reached into her handbag and pulled out a notebook. It helped her to make notes when she was trying to figure something out. She started listing things. Trevor March. Josh Walters. Elena Estes. Art Crowley. What was going on with them?

She listed her visit to Jack Carruthers. She hadn't heard anything from Jack since her meeting with him at his office yesterday morning. She considered calling him, then decided not to. If he had something to tell her, he'd be in touch. Jack was a good guy. She could trust him.

She looked at the passing scenery, marveling at how DC changed since she'd last lived here. It had expanded beyond belief. Her time here had started out well but had quickly gone downhill. Leaving had been the best thing she could have done. She'd resumed her life in Rivermont and had settled back into the loving arms of her mother. She'd regretted the lies she'd felt she had to tell her mother about her widowhood. But with the baby coming, she felt it was the only thing she could do.

From the moment Julia had learned of her pregnancy, she'd never regretted the baby. She'd never regretted the way she'd chosen to live her life. Her mother had been supportive and loving. Julia could not have asked for more. She had spun a story for her mother of a whirlwind courtship and marriage to an Army lieutenant who was about to be shipped overseas. A few months later, she'd been notified of his death in a military incident. She'd just discovered she was pregnant and hadn't even had a chance to tell her husband.

Of course, there was no Army lieutenant husband. There was just Trevor March. The only person who'd ever known that Trevor was Lee's father was Elena Estes. And Julia had sworn her to secrecy.

Julia had ended her relationship with Trevor because of his refusal to break away from Art Crowley. Julia hated Art for a variety of reasons, the main one being his attempted rape. She knew him to be a cruel, dishonest human being, and she wanted nothing to do with him.

No matter what she said to Trevor, no matter how hard she tried to convince him, Trevor wouldn't listen. He insisted she was wrong about Art. He insisted that Art was his true friend, someone Trevor would never give up on.

At last, Julia had given up on Trevor. She'd confronted him one last time, to tell him it was over between them unless he renounced his friendship with Art. Trevor had refused, begging Julia to give Art another chance. Julia had ended the relationship, convinced that this was the only way to get on with her life.

Two days later, Art had hosted the fateful river cruise on his yacht. Sometime during the cruise, the model Natalia had died and Trevor, taking responsibility for Natalia's death, had supposedly committed suicide out of guilt over her death.

Once upon a time, Julia had been madly in love with Trevor March. He was funny, handsome, kind, generous, everything she could have wanted. She trusted him with her heart, then lost that trust along with her heart. Breaking off their relationship had been the hardest thing she'd ever done, then and now. She'd thought Trevor was her life, only to realize he was as far from that as was possible.

When she'd found out about his suicide, she thought she would die also. She couldn't bear the thought of a world without Trevor in it. A few weeks after his death, she learned she was pregnant.

It had taken her years to heal. Baby Lee had been a godsend. Loving her daughter kept her sane. Her mother had assumed Julia's ongoing despair was a combination of the loss of her husband and postpartum depression. She'd never really started dating again. Every once in awhile, she'd have dinner with a man but never with any romantic intentions. One of her close friends insisted that Julia seemed to emanate anti-romantic pheromones.

Outwardly Julia had laughed at that theory but had secretly thought her friend was probably spot on.

As the limo spend along, Julia retreated from her memories of the past and brought her attention back to the present. She was furious at this ambush by Elena. Of course, that bastard Art Crowley had instigated it. But Elena had gone along with him, for whatever reason.

The limo exited the highway and sped along an outer access road for several miles. The countryside was beautiful. Green hills, towering trees, sunlight shining over it all. Crowley had certainly picked an exquisite area for his estate, Julia thought. The limo turned into a wide driveway and traveled up a road lined with trees. The tops of the trees formed a canopy over the road, blocking out the sun. The headlights of the limousine reflected off the canopy of leaves, spotlighting the curve of the tree branches.

The limo pulled into a circular drive in front of a huge home, so large it looked more like a castle than a house. The limo came to a stop, and the driver got out. He came around and opened her door, not looking at her. Julia got out, and the driver closed the door behind her. He got her suitcase out of the trunk and wheeled it up to the front door. He dropped the suitcase there and quickly walked back to the limo without a word. Julia had been tempted to yell at him but figured he was only following Art Crowley's orders. But she did flip him a middle finger as he drove off, proud of herself for her rare misbehavior.

Before she could knock or ring the doorbell, the front door swung open. Elena and Art were standing there, stone-faced. Julia glared at them, not speaking. An older woman in a maid's uniform slipped past Elena and grabbed the handle of Julia's suitcase and took it inside the mansion. Julia saw the woman dragging the wheeled suitcase up a huge, winding staircase.

Elena and Art stood back, making room for Julia to enter the house. None of them had yet spoken a word. Finally, Julia turned to Elena and demanded, "What the hell is going on here?"

Elena pointed to Art, saying, "This is his show, unfortunately."

Art grimaced, then gestured to the hallway. "Let's take this into the library." He headed down the hall. Elena followed behind him. Julia stood there for a moment, feeling helpless and furious. She finally followed behind Elena, clenching and unclenching her fists as she walked.

Art opened the double doors leading off the hall and entered a room. Elena paused at the doorway, holding up a hand. "I'm so sorry about this, Jules," she whispered. "I didn't have a choice."

For a moment, Julia wanted to spit in the face of the woman she now considered a traitor, a definitely former friend. But then, seeing the glint of tears in Elena's eyes, she changed her mind. She walked wordlessly past Elena into what Art had called the library. As she looked around the spacious room, she could see why it was called the library. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves covered three of the four walls, and books filled the shelves.

Art Crowley moved toward a serving table at the window side of the room. At one end of the table were a coffee urn, a tea service, and bottles of water and soft drinks. The other end of the table featured trays of croissants and muffins and bowls of fruit. Crowley began to serve himself, and he motioned Elena and Julia to join him.

Elena poured herself a cup of coffee and took a seat at one of the library tables in the center of the room. Julia shook her head and sat at the same table as Elena, but at the other end. She sat there staring grimly at their host. She'd hated this man for more than 30 years and felt sick to her stomach to be in his presence again.

The man was an egotist to the nth degree. It was unbelievable that he would be considering a run for the presidency. After what the country had been through in the past several years, this could not happen.

During those years, Julia had become a news junkie, as the country suffered through a demoralizing presidency. Her news addiction had begun during the final days before the inauguration. She had hoped that some last-minute revelation would prevent the inauguration of the monster that the country had somehow elected. She'd stayed glued to CNN and MSNBC, hoping for a reprieve. She'd become obsessed with a long list of Twitter feeds, hoping for news that would protect the country. As the investigations dragged on, Julia had begun to lose hope. She'd gradually weaned herself off cable news and Twitter, thinking that nothing was ever going to rid the White House of its infestation.

Then one Friday evening in September of the second year of the presidency, news of indictments had filtered through to Julia from her minimal connection to the news. Hoping this might be the beginning of the end, she once again plugged in to the cable news stations and the Twitter feeds.

Slowly, the investigation played itself out in public, after months of hidden activity. Indictments dribbled out; the major participants in the presidential campaign were tried, convicted and imprisoned. The president floundered around, futilely denying any involvement. Congress finally voted for impeachment. But before the impeachment hearings could begin, thank God, it had come to an end with an embarrassing resignation in disgrace. In January, almost two years to the day of his inauguration, the president announced his resignation, ostensibly for health reasons.

Julia gritted her teeth as she thought, 'No, it can't happen again. Art Crowley would be worse than the president they'd gotten rid of.' She would do whatever she could, whatever was necessary, to make sure Crowley got nowhere near the White House.

Art walked over to the table where Julia and Elena were sitting and sat across from Elena. He brought coffee and a muffin with him. It made Julia nauseous to see him eating the muffin. She found herself wishing he would choke on every bite.

**Chapter 14**  
**Lee**  
**Wednesday**  
**May 15**

On Tuesday night, Casey and Lee had been surprised to learn from the Wher R U app that Julia had turned off access to the app. So they had no clue where she was.

The next morning, they sat at the kitchen's breakfast bar, trying but failing to present a normalcy to Penny and Paul.

"Mama, is something wrong?" Penny asked, giving her mother a concerned look.

"No, sweetie, everything's fine," Lee lied.

"But you look sad, Mama," Paul chimed in.

"Mama's not sad, buddy," Casey told Paul. "There's nothing to worry about."

Penny stood up and said, "May we be excused and go over to Grandma Julia's?"

Casey and Lee exchanged glances, and Lee indicated that she would take this one. "Honey, Grandma had to go out of town -- so she's not home right now."

Penny and Paul stared at their mother, as if not understanding. Then Penny said, "But Mama, Grandma was going to take us to the Science Center today after school. She can't be out of town."

Once again, Lee and Casey looked at one another. This time, Casey took the lead. "Something came up unexpectedly for Grandma. I'm sure you'll have your trip to the Science Center as soon as she's back home."

That answer seemed to satisfy Penny and Paul, at least for now. They went back upstairs to their rooms to get dressed for school.

"Well, that was a hard one," Lee said. "Thanks for your help."

"I wish we'd had better answers for the kids. Speaking of answers, have you tried the Wher R U app again this morning?"

"No," Lee said. "I'll try it now." She pulled her cell phone out of her robe pocket and located the app on her phone. "Whoa!" she exclaimed.

"What?" Casey asked.

"Look at this," Lee said, handing her phone to Casey.

"This says she's in DC," Casey says. "That can't be right. What would she be doing in DC?"

Lee was quiet for a moment, thinking. "Well, that's where she lived before I was born. She came back to Rivermont when she was pregnant with me." Lee paused, then added, "To the best of my knowledge, she never went back."

"Lee, her being there must have something to do with her visit with Dad. I wish he felt he could tell us everything about that visit."

"Do you want me to make a run at him?" Lee asked.

"Sure, have at it. But I don't see Dad caving, no matter what sob story you tell him," Casey warned.

Lee gave him a playful punch in the arm and said, "Give me more credit than that. After all, I've made a career of telling stories."

Lee reached over and took her phone back from her husband. She went to her phone Favorites and punched the icon for her mother. The phone rang four times, then went to voice mail. Lee hesitated but then once again left a message for Julia, asking her to please call back at her earliest convenience.

A few minutes later, Lee was dressed and ready to take Penny and Paul school. After dropping them off and promising to be back at the end of the day to pick them up, Lee headed downtown to visit her father-in-law. She'd called his assistant Della to find out if Jack still spent time in the coffee shop next door to his office. Della confirmed that he still did and said he'd be there in an hour or so to read the newspaper and eat a late breakfast.

Lee intended to confront him there, outside the office, and beg him to help her figure out what her mother was up to. On the drive downtown, Lee called Casey to fill him in on what she was planning to do. He was at his desk at the precinct and told her he didn't think she had a chance of changing his father's mind about the confidentiality of Julia's visit.

"Like I told you, sweetie, even though he considers me part of his firm, there were some facts about Julia's visit he wouldn't share with me," Casey said.

"Well, sweetie," Lee teased in return. "Would you like to make a small wager?"

Casey chuckled and asked, "What did you have in mind?"

"How about if I get your dad to 'fess up, you take me out for an elegant dinner?" Lee said.

"And what do I get if you fail?" Casey asked.

"That's not going to happen, you know," Lee said. "But what would you like if by some miracle you win the bet?"

Casey thought for a moment then said, "What about if you make me my favorite dinner?"

"Not..." Lee began and then was interrupted by Casey.

"Yes," Casey said. "If I win the bet, you'll make your famous homemade toasted ravioli for me."

Lee sighed, "Okay, okay. Thank heavens, I'm going to win this bet, and you're not. Do you know how long it takes to make homemade ravioli? And how complicated it is? That's why I never make it, no matter how good it is."

"My mouth is watering just thinking about how good it's going to taste. Because there's no way you're going to induce Dad to cave. No way!" Casey said.

They ended their phone call with both of them grinning, each convinced of victory.



When Lee arrived at Double P Security downtown, she started to pull into the parking garage across the street when she saw a parking spot on the street near the coffee shop. She parallel parked in the spot, shocked that she was able to do it on her first try. Usually, parallel parking involved a lot of false starts and retries.

On a whim, Lee had brought along her laptop, thinking perhaps she'd plant herself somewhere in the coffee shop and try to get some writing done. Her writers' block was still going strong -- she hadn't written a decent sentence in weeks.

Inside the coffee shop, she looked around for Jack but didn't see him. She got herself a coffee and a cinnamon scone and seated herself at a table next to the front window.

She opened her laptop and turned it on. She sat there motionless, her fingers poised on the keyboard but nothing was happening. She thought about how for the past two months, she'd been at the mercy of a case of writer's block. Yeah, she'd written a few words here and a few words there, but none of them were worth keeping. As she sat there staring at a blank page in Word, she knew she'd have to bite the bullet and do the thing she really didn't want to do.

Pulling her cell phone out of her jacket pocket, she scrolled through her contacts till she found Dr. McDonald's number. Tapping the name, she waited while the phone rang. As she'd expected, the call eventually dropped to voice mail.

"Hi, Doc," Lee said into the phone. "It's Lee Carruthers. Long time no talk. Here's the deal. I need to make an appointment to come in and see you. For the past couple of months, I've been unable to write, no matter what I do. So please give me a call when it's convenient so I can set up an appointment. Talk to you soon." Lee ended the call and put the phone back in her pocket.

She sat there, lost in thought, thinking about the first time she'd met Rebecca McDonald seven years ago. Following Penny's birth, Lee had slipped into what Dr. McDonald had eventually diagnosed as a postpartum depression. Lee's OB/GYN had referred Lee to Dr. McDonald. Lee had resisted going, insisting she was fine, insisting she didn't need to see a therapist. But Casey had encouraged her to at least meet the doctor, see what she thought. Lee had taken his advice and was glad she had. They'd hit it off immediately, and for the first time in a long while, Lee felt there was really hope for her depression.

In their getting-to-know-one-another session, Rebecca McDonald told Lee she was in her early forties and had been practicing for almost a dozen years in Rivermont.

"I moved here from Silicon Valley, which is totally a different world. My ex-husband was a computer nerd at one of the start-ups, and I followed him there. But it just wasn't right for me -- not the marriage and not Silicon Valley. I got my undergraduate degree here at Rivermont University and always liked the city. So I thought I'd try it out, and it turns out to be just the place for me."

Lee had eventually accepted the fact that she needed antidepressants and therapy. A year and a half later, Rebecca had released her as a patient. After Lee's last session, the two women had gone out for coffee, deciding they were destined to be friends. Every couple of months, they got together for a long Saturday lunch. Lee tried to play matchmaker, much to Rebecca's amusement. So far, none of the potential matches had worked out but Lee was still determined to find her friend's soul mate.

Lee's phone vibrated in her pocket, and she drew it out, grinning as she saw Rebecca's name and number on the screen.

"Hi, Doc," she said.

"Hi, yourself," Rebecca answered. "Sorry to hear about the writer's block. I know what a bummer that is for you. I've got an opening at 11 tomorrow morning, if that works for you?"

"That would be great. I really appreciate your speedy service."

"We aim to please," Rebecca said, then added, "See you tomorrow."

Lee breathed a sigh of relief, then closed her laptop, giving up on writing. She looked around the coffee shop, ready for a few minutes of people watching. A glance at her phone showed that it was almost 10 o'clock. She wondered where Jack was. He should have been here by now. She started to call Della again when she saw Jack coming through the coffee shop door. She put her phone down on the table and stood up, waving to Jack. He broke into a grin and headed her way. They hugged, and Jack said, "Casey told me you were here waiting for me."

"Rats," Lee thought. Evidently Casey had spilled the beans about her surprise ambush of Jack. She bet he'd also told Jack about her plan to get him to spill her mother's secrets.

"Yep, here I am," Lee said, thinking Casey was going to pay for this. He really must want that homemade ravioli for him to reveal her plot to Jack.

"Let me get some coffee and food, and I'll be back," Jack said, then walked toward the counter.

Lee sat back down, fuming at her husband's betrayal. She made a quick phone call, hoping to catch him in the office. He answered on the first ring with a cheery, "What's up, sweetheart?"

"How could you betray me like that?" Lee demanded.

"What?" Casey sounded confused. He followed up with "What are you talking about?"

"You told your Dad that I would be at the coffee shop waiting for him," Lee said, gritting her teeth.

"Yeah, he called to check in this morning, and I told him you were planning to meet up with him at the coffee shop," Casey said.

"Did you tell him what I was planning to do?" Lee asked.

"Of course not," Casey said, indignation in his voice. "I wouldn't betray your confidence like that."

Lee hesitated, then asked, "Are you sure you didn't tell him?"

"Cross my heart," Casey said.

Lee heard the sincerity in his voice and suddenly felt ashamed for doubting him. "Sorry, sweetie," she said. "I shouldn't have doubted you. Oops, here Jack comes. I'll talk to you soon." Lee ended the call and smiled up at her father-in-law, determined to do her best to get her mother's secrets out of him.

An hour later, Lee left the coffee shop, a few minutes after Jack's departure. Her mission had been a failed one. Jack had refused to crack. He'd very gently reminded her that his company followed a strict policy of confidentiality. He'd emphasized the fact that family connections did not negate the confidentiality policy. Lee

had told him how worried she was about her mother and how Julia had gone to Washington D.C. without telling anyone.

Jack had commiserated with her, saying he knew she was worried about Julia. He had taken her hand and said, "I wish there were something I could do, sweetie. But all I can do is to tell you not to worry. Your mom is intelligent and capable. I have no doubt she can handle whatever comes her way."

"I wish I could believe that's true, Jack. I really do. I'm so worried. She hasn't answered my calls or texts, and I don't have the faintest idea what she's doing in DC," Lee had said.

Jack had considered for a moment, then pulled his phone from his jacket pocket. He swiped through screens, then began typing. Lee heard the whooshing sound indicating a sent text. She looked at Jack quizzically, and he handed his phone to her. She read the message he'd sent to her mother aloud:

"J: Give me a call when it's convenient. I have news for you. And let me know that you're okay."

"I'll let you know when I hear from her," Jack said, patting Lee's hand. They sat there for a few more minutes, waiting to see if Julia responded. But Jack's phone remained silent. Finally, he stood, saying he had to get back to the office. He gave Lee a hug and said, "Like I said, please don't worry. Everything will be all right."

On the drive home, Lee called Casey's cell and got his voice mail. She left a message, saying, "Well, you won the bet. Jack wouldn't tell me anything. However, he did send a text to Mom, and he promised to let me know about her response so that's something. I guess homemade ravioli is on the menu tonight. I'll stop at the grocery store on the way home and then spend the rest of the day slaving away in the kitchen."

Back in his office, Jack settled in for a day of paperwork, his least-liked part of owning his own business. Della was a godsend but Jack still needed to sign checks to vendors and contractors and review client invoices. Sometimes he wished Casey was ready to join the firm. But his son grooved on being a police detective and had no wish to leave what he so obviously enjoyed. Jack could understand that. He'd felt the same way about being chief. Only Mary's death had gotten him to give up his dream job.

Every once in awhile, he checked his phone, anticipating a message from Julia. When he hadn't heard anything by noon, he began to worry. He'd fully expected to hear from her immediately. Deciding a phone call might be in order, he tapped her number and listened through five rings till voice mail picked up.

"Hi, this is Julia," came her cheery voice. "Please leave a message, and I'll get back to you."

Jack decided he needed to let her know how worried Lee was about her mother so he said, "Julia, I hate to pressure you but Lee is extremely worried about you. Please give her a call at your earliest convenience and let her know you're all right. Thanks."

He ended the call and sat there thinking about the situation. In their meeting yesterday morning, Julia hadn't told him that she intended to go to DC. He wondered what was up with that.

**Chapter 15**  
**Julia and Elena**  
**Wednesday**  
**May 15**

Art finished his muffin and wiped crumbs from his lips and then his hands with a pristine white linen napkin. Julia sat at the end of the table, rigid with indignation. She'd still not spoken a word to Art Crowley, but Art had ignored her silence. He turned to Elena and said, "Let's get this show on the road."

Elena nodded and turned to Julia. "Jules, would you please tell Art the story about this man you think looks like Trevor?"

Julia glared at the woman she now considered her former friend and said, "You can tell him what I told you."

Elena started to protest, then seemed to think better of it. She took a deep breath, folded her hands on the table and began to speak. "All right," she said, then turned to face Julia and say, "Please interrupt if I get any of this wrong."

She told Art about Julia's daughter Lee showing her mother a picture of a man that Lee thought looked familiar. "When Julia saw the photo, she immediately thought the man looked like Trevor March, 30 years older. That's when Julia called me. And that's when I called you, Art," Elena said, looking directly at Art Crowley.

Silence filled the room. Then Art turned to Julia and asked, "Why would your daughter think this man -- what's his name? Josh Walters -- looked familiar?"

Julia stared at Art, wanting to be anywhere but in his presence. She shook her head and said, "I don't know. I don't know." Then she gasped and said, "Oh, no."

"What?" Elena asked.

"The picture!" Julia said.

"What picture?" Elena asked.

Julia buried her face in her hands, then looked up at Elena. "I had a box of things from DC that I brought back with me to Rivermont. One of the things was a framed photograph of Trevor and me standing next to the Lincoln Memorial. I guess it's possible that Lee somehow saw that photo." She closed her eyes and shook her head. "Lee always was a little explorer so perhaps she saw the photo." Julia thought for a moment, then said, "Funny, she never mentioned it or asked about it." Then she shook her head and said, "No, she wouldn't want me to know she'd been poking around in my things."

Art stood up, looked down the table at Julia and said in a harsh voice, "Well, I guess that explains that." He walked over to an intercom box on the wall by the library door and spoke into it. "Mrs. Allison, please come show Mrs. Dennison to her room."

"What?" Julia exclaimed.

"I want to talk to Elena in private," Art said, walking back to the table and sitting down. At a light tap on the library door, Art said, "Come in."

The woman who had taken Julia's suitcase upstairs stood in the doorway. Art turned to Julia and said, "Go."

Julia stood up and went over to the library door. She hesitated there for a moment, as if she wanted to say something but then thought better of it. She left the library, closing the door firmly behind her.

Julia followed the woman up the broad circular staircase; Mrs. Allison was her name, Julia remembered. The woman walked down to the end of one of the hallways that led off from the staircase. She opened a door at the end of the hall and stood aside to let Julia pass through. A few steps inside the room, Julia paused to look around. The room was large, almost as large as the great room in her house in Rivermont. One wall was all windows, overlooking a woods. The windows were uncovered, open to the world but Julia assumed that no one could see in from outside.

Her suitcase lay open on a bench at the end of what looked like an oversized king bed. She saw that the suitcase was empty and assumed the woman, Mrs. Allison, that is, had hung up her clothes and placed her toiletries in an adjoining bathroom. Julia wasn't sure how she felt about that. She was unaccustomed to anyone doing things for her, and she wasn't sure she liked it. Actually, it felt slightly presumptuous and intrusive. She turned around and reached out to close the door. Mrs. Allison still stood outside in the hall. Julia hesitated, then said, "Thank you. That will be all." The woman turned and walked down the hall toward the stairway.

Julia closed the door and stood there for a moment, unsure what to do now. Then she made up her mind and opened the door and walked down the hall to the stairs. Seeing no one, she descended the stairs and headed back to the library. She edged up to the door and reached out to gently open it a crack. She could hear voices from inside, and leaned in close to better hear what Elena and Art were saying.

"Art, I don't understand what's going on? Why all this subterfuge? Why all the mystery?" Elena's voice was strident and demanding.

Art answered, his voice sounding farther away than Elena's. "There's a lot you don't know, E," he said, using the old nickname for her.

"So tell me," Elena demanded.

Art's voice became even more difficult for Julia to hear. She moved in closer to the door, putting her ear as near the crack as she dared.

"Natalia's death was an accident." Art spoke slowly in a strained tone of voice.

"I'd always assumed that. There's no way that Trev would have intentionally killed anyone," Elena said.

"It wasn't Trevor," Art said.

"What do you mean, it wasn't Trevor? Of course, it was Trevor," Elena insisted.

"No, it was me," Art said.

"You? What do you mean? What are you talking about?" Elena's voice rose, and Julia could hear the footsteps of someone walking around the room. She wondered which one was pacing or was it both Art and Elena?

Slowly, Art began to speak. "We were in the captain's cabin. Natalia was trying to leave. I guess I'd gotten a little rough with her, and she didn't like it. I reached out to keep her from leaving and somehow she fell.

She hit her head on the corner of the coffee table. I tried to lift her up onto the couch but she was limp and bleeding. Then, she wasn't breathing. I didn't know what to do."

Elena interrupted with, "It was you ? Is that what you're saying? You killed Natalia?"

"No, no, I didn't kill her. She fell and hit her head and died. I didn't kill her. But I didn't think anyone would believe me. Earlier in the day, we'd been arguing rather vehemently and some of the guests on the cruise heard us."

"So how did Trevor get involved in all this?" Elena asked.

Julia leaned in even further, straining to hear Art's answer to this all-important question.

"Trevor was up on deck. I went up and asked him to come down to the captain's cabin. He did. When he saw Natalia, he went berserk. He was hell-bent on calling the police or the river patrol or whatever. I finally calmed him down and asked him to help me think this through. I told him about the argument Natalia and I had and how some of the guests heard the fight -- and it was a fight actually, not just an argument. We were yelling at each other and Natalia slapped me." Art paused, then continued.

"I was afraid the authorities would assume I had killed Natalia. And I didn't -- honest to God, I didn't. It was an accident." Julia could hear the stress in Art's voice but there was no way she believed him. He was a liar then, and he was a liar now.

Elena said, "So what did Trevor say?"

"He kept insisting on calling the police, telling me it would be okay, that they would believe me. I told him I didn't want to take that chance, that I had to find another way out of this. Trevor tried to leave the cabin, to go call the police. But I stopped him. I guess I threatened him. I told him his livelihood depended on me and did he want to give that up? I played on our long friendship, how much we'd been through together. Then came the coup de grace. I reminded him how I'd saved his life so many years ago and that he owed me more than he could ever repay. I guess I finally reached him. He sat down on one of the couches and buried his face in his hands and began to cry. After awhile, he looked up at me and said, "What do you want me to do?"

"And what did you say to Trevor?" Elena said. Julia could hear the steel and the judgment in her tone.

It took Art a few moments to answer. Julia jumped when he started speaking again. His voice was louder than before, and she assumed he must have moved closer to the library door.

"I begged him to help me. I begged him to take the blame for Natalia's death. At first, he flatly refused, saying he wouldn't throw his life away like that. So for awhile, we were at an impasse. Then I got an idea. I thought about it for a few minutes, then posed it to Trev as a hypothetical." Art's voice got softer, and Julia guessed he had moved away from the door.

"I said to him, what about if I tell the police you were the one in the cabin with Natalia? Then what if we fake your death? Fake your suicide? Make it look like you jumped overboard and drowned. That you were so overcome with guilt and remorse that you took your own life."

"And what did Trev have to say about your cockamamie idea?" Elena asked.

"Well, at first he rejected the idea out of hand. Then I sweetened the deal. I promised him a fortune, a new identity, a new life. That got his attention. He'd been down, really down about Julia dumping him, and he was not handling that well. He said he wanted to think about it so he left the cabin. I think he went up and walked around the deck."

"And you're there in the captain's cabin with Natalia..." Elena broke off and in her head Julia finished Elena's unfinished sentence -- Natalia's body.

Julia felt herself begin to shake at the horror she was hearing, and it took all the strength she had to calm herself.

"Yes, I was there, panicked beyond belief. If Trev didn't go along with my plan, my life was over. Or so I thought. It's possible I could have found an attorney who could have gotten me off but at the time I didn't think so."

"Then what happened?" Elena asked.

"After about half an hour, Trev came back to the captain's cabin. He looked like death warmed over. I was so sure he was going to turn down my plan. But to my shock he agreed, with certain stipulations."

"Stipulations?" Elena asked.

"His main stipulation was that he would disappear and that no one, not even me, would know where he was. He insisted on that. He said he wanted to put this life behind him forever." Art's voice was once again a bit louder, and Julia assumed he was closer to the library door.

"And what did you say to that?" Elena asked.

"I agreed, of course," Art said. "That suited me perfectly. I wanted this whole thing over."

"What happened then?" Elena asked.

"We quickly decided that to fake Trev's death we'd make it look like he'd jumped overboard and drowned. Trev was going to hide in a special storage area in the lower level of the yacht. The storage area was a hidden one that I was pretty sure could withstand a search by the police."

"What about Trev's new life?" Elena said.

"I said I would put together a boatload of cash and hide it in a shack on my property outside DC. Trev would retrieve the money and make a new life for himself," Art said. "Once we knew what we were going to do, I went up to the main deck and joined my guests. Trev went up to one of the smaller decks where he left his shoes, watch and wallet next to the railing, along with a note saying he couldn't face what he'd done. He told me he'd throw his jacket overboard in hopes that it would wash up somewhere. I'd wanted him to confess to Natalia's death but he refused."

"Then what?" Elena said.

"According to the plan, I waited about half an hour, then took one of the guests down to the captain's cabin with me, ostensibly to give him a tour but actually to discover Natalia's body. And that's what I did. I acted appropriately shocked and stunned. I had my captain alert the authorities and they took over from there. Once the police came aboard, they quickly found Trev's note and belongings. There was an investigation, of course. It went on for weeks, but the authorities eventually closed the case, saying Trevor March had killed Natalia and then taken his own life."

"Sounds kind of flimsy to me," Elena said.

"Maybe to you but not to the authorities. Trev's note convinced them that he was responsible for Natalia's death and that he couldn't handle the guilt and the repercussions."

"This is just unbelievable, Art. What were the two of you thinking?" Elena said.

"We were trying to find a way out that worked for both of us. And I think it worked just fine till now. I didn't have a clue about where Trev was or what he'd done with his life. I never heard a word from him. It was as if he'd disappeared off the face of the earth. He could have really been dead for all I knew," Art said.

"And what about Julia?" Elena asked.

"What about Julia?" Art replied.

"Julia was in love with Trev. Didn't she deserve to know he wasn't really dead?" Elena said.

"They were done. She broke up with Trev. I never knew why but Trev was sure it was final," Art said.

"I know why she broke up with him," Elena said. "It was because of you. Julia hated you, still hates you, for that matter. She gave Trev an ultimatum. He had to break off all ties with you or she would be out of his life. And Trev, the stupid fool, chose you over Julia, not even knowing what he was doing." Elena's voice broke.

Hearing Elena's words, Julia thought she might pass out. Surely Elena wouldn't tell Art.

"What do you mean he didn't know what he was doing?" Art asked.

"Never mind," Elena said. "it's not anything you need to know."

Julia relaxed, her secret safe.



**Chapter 16**  
**Julia**  
**Wednesday**  
**May 15**

Julia stood there, motionless, her mind whirling, trying to process all she'd just heard. It couldn't be true. But it was true. All these years, Trev had been alive. She slowly walked away from the library door and down the hallway to the circular staircase. Standing at the foot of the staircase, she tried to decide what to do. Then, making a decision, she ran up the stairs and down the hall to her room. She quickly repacked all her belongings and went back down the staircase.

She quietly slipped out a side door and walked over to the garage, dragging her wheeled suitcase behind her, hoping she could find a car with keys in it and make her escape. She was surprised she hadn't come across anyone as she was leaving the house, not Mrs. Allison and none of the other servants, of which there must be a bunch for such a large estate.

Inside the garage, she found quite an assortment of vehicles. Front and center, was the long black limo that had brought her to Crowley's estate. There were two pickup trucks and several automobiles. None of the doors of the vehicles were locked but none seemed to have the keys inside. None, that is, till she came to a nondescript Ford parked just inside one of the garage's doors. A set of keys was on the console between the two front seats. Julia threw her suitcase in the back seat, got in the driver's seat and started the car. She looked around but still didn't see anyone, thank heavens. She backed the car out of the garage, and started down the estate's long driveway. Looking in the car's rearview mirror, she saw a young man standing by the garage, watching as she drove off. She stepped on the accelerator, speeding away, hoping the young man wouldn't sound the alert that one of the guests was escaping.

She drove to Dulles Airport, thankfully remembering the route. She parked the car in long-term parking and went inside the terminal to deal with her ticket issue. She'd had to pay a fee to change her departure date but it was well worth the money to get the hell out of Dodge. An hour later and two hundred dollars poorer, she boarded a nonstop flight back to Rivermont. She wanted nothing more than to be back in Rivermont with her family and friends. Her first stop would be the Rivermont police station to talk to Casey and tell him all that she'd learned.

She needed to tell her daughter about her quick trip to Washington. Julia had regretted having to keep her plans and whereabouts a secret from Lee. But she knew her daughter would have tried to talk her out of going and would have moved heaven and earth to stop her.

She used the phone at her seat on the plane to call Lee and reassure her daughter about her mother's safety and well-being. The call went easier than Julia had expected. Lee had badgered her mother a bit about the reason for her unexpected trip to DC but Julia had given her what sounded like a valid reason. Lee accepted the explanation that Julia had met her friend Elena Estes there. Lee said she hoped her mother enjoyed their reunion and added, "I hope I get to meet this Elena someday."

"Maybe someday you will," Julia answered

Julia promised to fill her daughter in on everything when she was got home. Lee finally backed off, albeit reluctantly.

Three hours later, Julia was back in Rivermont and at the police station talking to Casey. Her son-in-law had been shocked by Julia's story. He had her go through it twice, taking notes as she talked. Finally, he'd told her he needed to talk to the police chief. None of this was in their jurisdiction, and Casey knew this was above his pay grade.

"Let me go give Chief Paulsen a heads-up, and then I'll have you come tell him your story." On his way to the chief's office, Casey showed Julia into a small conference room and offered her coffee, which she declined. Julia paced around the conference room, nervous and on edge. Then she took out her cell phone and called Jack.

"Jack, hi, it's Julia," she said. "Do you have a moment?"

"For you, always," Jack said.

"I don't know where to begin," she said.

"At the beginning," Jack said. "That's always the best place."

Julia did just that, pacing as she talked into the cell phone. She began by telling him she was at the police station and had just talked to Casey about what had happened to her and that Casey was going to have her talk to Chief Paulsen. Then she told him about the late night phone call from her friend Elena Estes and her subsequent trip to DC. She told him about her rude treatment by the limo driver and the arrogance of Art Crowley. When she told him what she'd overheard, he was dumbfounded.

"What the hell is going on here?" Jack demanded. "I don't believe this."

"I didn't believe it either at first but I don't think we have any choice but to believe it's the truth. The question is what do we do about it?" Julia said.

"Well, Casey's headed in the right direction by talking to Paulsen. He'll get in touch with the proper authorities. I'm assuming that will be the FBI but that's only a guess. Listen, Julia, I'm going to come down to the station now."

"Oh, Jack, I'd really appreciate that. I can use all the support I can get. Thank you." They ended the call, and Julia stopped pacing, feeling relieved that Jack was coming to help. She sat down at the small conference table and took a deep breath, preparing herself for the onslaught that lay ahead.

Half an hour later, Casey returned to the conference room, accompanied by an older man with an impressive walrus moustache. Julia had never met the man but recognized him from newspaper photos she'd seen over the years.

"Julia, this is Chief Paulsen. Chief, this is my mother-in-law Julia Dennison." Julia and the chief shook hands.

The three of them sat down at the conference table. Casey turned to Julia and said, "I filled Chief Paulsen in on what happened in DC but he'd like to hear the details from you."

Julia nodded and said, "Of course. Before I start, let me say that I called Jack, and he's on his way down here."

Chief Paulsen frowned and said questioningly, "Jack?"

Julia nodded again and said, "Jack Carruthers, Casey's dad. Surely you know him?"

"Yes, of course, I know him." Julia was puzzled by what sounded like something hostile in Paulsen's words. What was going on here, she wondered.

Casey cleared his throat and said, "Julia, why don't you go ahead and walk the chief through what happened."

Julia nodded for the third time as she said, "Certainly," and began telling Chief Paulsen the same story she'd shared with Casey and then with his father. As background information, she gave Paulsen a brief overview of how she knew Art Crowley, Elena Estes and Trevor March.

As she talked, Julia watched Paulsen's changing facial expressions. For some reason, she interpreted his expressions as disbelief, as if he weren't buying her story. Why would he do that, she wondered.

As she neared the end of her recitation, there was a light tap on the conference door. Casey stood up and went over to the door. He opened it and said, "Hi, Dad. Come on it."

Jack Carruthers entered the room, and Julia thought, "What a presence this man has." She saw Paulsen stiffen and wondered if there was bad blood between the two men, at least on Paulsen's side. She'd have to ask Jack about it later.

Casey and Jack sat down at the table, on the side facing Julia. Paulsen sat at one end of the table, a frozen expression on his face. Jack turned to Paulsen and said, "Good to see you, Frank. How are things going around here?"

"Good, things are good," Frank Paulsen. Julia thought the words were right but the tone was all wrong.

"Dad, Julia's just finished telling Chief Paulsen about what happened to her. I assume she's filled you in?" Casey said.

"Yes, she has," Jack said. He turned to Chief Paulsen and asked, "What are you planning, Frank?"

Paulsen hesitated, not answering. He stood and looked down at Julia. "Ms. Dennison, I'll be passing this situation along to the appropriate authorities. I'd suggest you stay available." With that, Paulsen turned and left the room, closing the door firmly behind him.

Julia turned to Jack and said, "What was that all about?"

Jack started to speak but Casey shook his head, and stood up. He walked over to one corner of the room and reached behind a frame photo of the city occupying a prominent spot on the wall. He fiddled around with something for a moment, then came back to the conference table.

"Since you left, Dad, the conference rooms have been outfitted with recording devices, courtesy of Chief Paulsen. I didn't want him to hear what you were about to say."

"Thanks, son," Jack said. "Paulsen has it in for me. When I retired, I recommended someone else for my job, not him. As you can imagine, that didn't go over too well with Frank."

Casey nodded and said, "Paulsen takes every opportunity to bad-mouth you. I try to stand up for you but he's made it very uncomfortable for me here. I haven't decided yet what I'm going to do."

Julia reached out and placed a hand on Casey's arm. "I'm sorry to hear that, Casey. I had no idea."

"Well, it is what it is. So far, it's manageable," Casey said.

"Let me know what I can do, son," Jack offered.

Casey grinned and said, "You could find another job for Paulsen."

Jack chuckled, then said, "Would that I could."

"So what do you think the chief is going to do?" Julia asked.

"When I talked to him earlier, he indicated that he was going to contact the FBI. But he wanted to hear your story directly from you first, before he contacted them."

The room was silent for a moment, then Casey asked, "Dad, are you still in touch with that agent you knew from years ago?"

Jack nodded and said, "Yes, I am. We get together for a beer every once in awhile. I think I see where you're going. You're thinking Paulsen might not follow through on contacting the authorities, that he might try to let it slip through the cracks. So maybe we should take this into our own hands."

"Well, it couldn't hurt," Casey said.

"Yes, it could," Jack said. "Paulsen might view that as insubordination on your part if you do anything. You could face disciplinary action or even lose your job. That's why you're going to stay out of it and leave it in my capable hands."

Casey started to protest but stopped when Julia interrupted. "Casey, Jack is right. You have to stay out of this. I had no idea that Paulsen had it in for you and Jack." She turned to Jack and said, "Would you be willing to talk to this contact of yours?"

"Yes, of course," Jack said. "I'd like you to come with me, if you're all right with that."

"Definitely," Julia answered. "Just let me know where and when."

Jack stood and so did Casey and Julia. They headed toward the conference room door. "I'll give my friend a call when I get back to the office. I'll call you with details."

Casey started to speak, then shook his head. "I was going to ask to be involved but that would be a mistake. Just let me know what happens, if you think that's all right."

"You got it, son," Jack said.

**Chapter 17**  
**Lee**  
**Wednesday**  
**May 15**

Lee stood in front of the elevator in Rebecca's office building, waiting for it to descend from the top floor. Dr. McDonald's office was on the fifth floor, and in the past, Lee had taken the stairs to the therapist's office. But she was running late and decided the elevator would be faster. However, it didn't seem that was the case.

When the elevator finally arrived in the lobby, a glance at her Fitbit told Lee she was already five minutes late for her appointment. Being on time had never been a thing with Lee, just with Casey. But despite that, she hated being late. So a day or so ago, she'd made a pact with herself to start giving herself a ten-minute head start on any appointment or meeting. Fortunately, she was the only passenger on the elevator and the car could go directly to the fifth floor. She stepped out of the elevator and half ran down the hallway to Dr. McDonald's office. In the waiting room, she rang the buzzer used to announce patients and stood impatiently by the door leading to the doctor's office. The door opened and Rebecca McDonald stuck her head out, a wide grin on her face.

"I don't believe it!" Rebecca said. "This is the first time ever that you've been almost on time for an appointment. Usually, you're at least 15 minutes late, leaving me pacing around in my office. Come in, come. It's so good to see you."

"Good to see you, too, Doc," Lee said. She walked directly over to the couch by the wall, sat down, then stretched out full-length. "Ready to go!"

Rebecca laughed and said, "You're a character as always. I've missed you, kid. We haven't done well at staying in touch."

"I know, I know. We'll have to work on that."

Rebecca sat in the doctor's chair, positioned behind the couch so that the patient couldn't see her. She opened her iPad, tapped on the screen, then said, "So, writer's block, eh?"

"Yup," Lee said. "Have you ever treated anyone with writer's block?"

"No, I haven't. That's why I did some research after you called to set up an appointment. The condition is really interesting, and I learned some fascinating things." Rebecca looked down at the iPad, then said, "Why don't we start with you describing what writer's block feels like to you."

Lee considered for a moment, then began. "Well, as a little bit of background, this is the first time I've ever experienced this. I've never had difficulty writing. It's always come easily and naturally. Then one day about two months ago, when I sat down at the computer, my mind just sort of went blank. I sat there for about an hour or so, writing a few words here and a few words there, all of them not worth anything."

"Hmmm," Rebecca murmured. "Then what did you do?"

"Well, that first time, I stopped trying to write and just went about my business. Then the same thing happened the next day and then the day after that. So I called a couple of my writer friends, and they shared their writing block experiences with me, along with some of their solutions. I tried meditation, that didn't help. Then I tried distractions -- you know, going to the art museum, the zoo, stuff like that. None of those things

worked although I enjoyed the experiences. One of my friends gave me a book of 500 writing jump starts, which sounds like a surefire cure but that didn't help either." Lee paused and reached inside her purse for her ever-present bottle of water and took a long drink.

"Another friend shared her theory that writers' block is caused by fear, which sounded logical to me. But then the more I thought about it, I realized I'm not really afraid of anything. So here we are. I have no answers, and I'm hoping you do."

Rebecca chuckled as she said, "Lee, you know it doesn't work that way. Any answers we come up with here are your answers, not my answers. All I can do is help you dig out the answers."

"Okay, doc, start digging," Lee said, with an answering chuckle.

"I do have something for us to try," Rebecca said tentatively.

"And that would be?" Lee asked.

"You'll remember that toward the end of your previous course of treatments, we did some hypnosis," Rebecca said.

"Yes, and that seemed to work really well for me," Lee said.

"It did," Rebecca agreed. "What would you think about trying it again?"

"I'm in," Lee answered.

"Let's start by having you close your eyes. Now, we'll relax your body, starting with your toes and working our way up to your brain." For the next few minutes, Rebecca's soft voice took Lee through a complete body relaxation. By the time, the relaxation reached her brain, Lee was in a hypnotic state.

Rebecca took Lee back in her memory to when she first began to write. "I was about seven," Lee said, her words soft and slow. "I wrote stories and sold them to our neighbors for a quarter."

"Tell me about the stories," Rebecca said.

"Mostly, they were mysteries. I was a great Nancy Drew fan."

"Mysteries?" Rebecca questioned.

"Yes," Lee said. "I would make up stories about missing items, secrets, hidden treasures. I was a nosy little girl. I can remember searching the house for Christmas presents. And I almost always found my presents. I would even secretly play with the toys before Christmas." Lee paused for a moment, then continued. "One of my favorite exploring activities had nothing to do with Christmas presents. One day while I was looking through my mother's room, I found a box shoved way back on a closet shelf. It was filled with all kinds of interesting things, pictures and lots of what looked like keepsakes, I guess."

Once again, Lee paused. But this time when she resumed speaking, there was surprise in her voice. "Pictures, I remember pictures. One in particular caught my attention. I forgot to say that I often went back to go through that box of keepsakes and pictures. Whenever my grandma was babysitting me, I would sneak into my mother's room and root through that box of treasures."

"Let's move on," Rebecca began, just as Lee interrupted her with, "Pictures!"

Lee jumped up from the couch and began to pace around the room, clearly having emerged from hypnosis. "I saw a picture," she said.

Lee stopped pacing and sat in a chair near to where Rebecca was sitting. "One of the pictures in the box was of my mother standing next to a man. He had his arm around her, and they were standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.

Rebecca just sat, waiting for Lee to continue. She didn't know where this was going but was content to let Lee lead the way.

"Okay, I have to do some explaining here. This doesn't have anything to do with my writer's block but it does pertain to something that's been bothering me. The other night Casey and I went to a seminar on stalking. The presenter looked so familiar to me but for the life of me, I couldn't remember ever meeting him. But now I know why he looked familiar. He was the man in the photo with my mom. Or at least it was his lookalike. Even though he was 30 or so years younger, I'm sure it was the same man."

Lee stood up and began to pace again. "I showed my mom a picture of the man from the seminar and thought she had some kind of reaction to it although she didn't say anything."

Lee stopped pacing and stood directly in front of Rebecca. "I'm going to cut this session short. I have to go see my mom and find out what's going on here."

Rebecca stood up and faced Lee. "Lee, I don't really think it's a good idea to end the session like this," she said gently. "I'm concerned about how you came out of the hypnotic state so abruptly, without me bringing you out of it.

"Yes, I understand but right now I need to deal with this," Lee said. "I'm fine. Please don't worry about me. I'll set up another session soon."

Rebecca sighed and said, "it's your decision, of course. But please let me know if you have any negative reactions or emotional backlash."

Lee said, "Of course, I will. But please don't worry. I'm fine." She reached out and squeezed Rebecca's arm, then left the office.

**Chapter 18**  
**Art Crowley and Elena Estes**  
**Wednesday**  
**May 15**

When Art and Elena discovered that Julia had fled, Art went into a rage the likes of which Elena had never seen. He stomped around the mansion, yelling, throwing things, completely out of control. Elena had attempted to rein him in but had no luck. She'd finally gone to her suite upstairs and had spent a couple of hours there, alone, pacing, stewing, not knowing what to do. She'd called and texted Julia repeatedly but got no response.

Finally, in the late afternoon, Elena went downstairs to get the lay of the land. Evidently, Art had calmed down. He was at his desk in his office, on the phone. He saw her standing in the doorway and gestured for her to come in. Standing behind Art by the windows was a tall man, dressed in workout clothes. Elena assumed it was one of Art's ever-present bodyguards. In the back of her mind, she wondered why he needed bodyguards; what was he afraid of? Or perhaps who was he afraid of.

With half her attention, Elena listened to Art's half of the telephone conversation. From what Art was saying, Elena deduced that he was talking to the investigator who was looking for Trevor March. And just as evidently, from Art's sputtering, angry comments, Trevor wasn't where he was supposed to be. After another few minutes of a disjointed conversation, Art slammed down the receiver of the landline and started swearing.

Elena interrupted his tirade with a soft-voiced, "Stop it, Art. That's not going to help."

Art glared at her, then shrugged and stopped yelling. Through the years, during their off and on relationship, Elena had not witnessed this rage-a-holic side of Art. She'd only seen him mildly pissed off, never in full-on rage mode.

Elena took a seat in one of the two chairs in front of Art's desk. She looked at him but didn't say anything.

"So have you talked to Julia?" Art asked.

"No," Elena said. "I've left voice messages for her and I texted several times, but I haven't heard anything back."

"I'm assuming she overheard our conversation in the library and that's what sent her running," Art said.

"That's what I'm assuming also," Elena said. "So now she knows everything."

"What do you think she'll do about it?" Art asked.

Elena shook her head as she said, "The Julia I used to know would run straight to the authorities. I'm pretty sure that current Julia is going to do the same thing. By the way, if you didn't already know it, her son-in-law is a homicide detective in Rivermont and the son-in-law's father is the former police chief of Rivermont."

"Jesus Christ," Art yelled, "can it get any worse?"

"Of course it can," Elena said. "And it's going to get worse. What are you going to do?"

At first, Elena thought Art wasn't going to answer. Then he nodded his head and said, "I'm going to find Trev and make sure he disappears for good this time." With that, Art stood and left the room.



Elena sat there for a few minutes, chills running down her spine. She crossed her arms across her chest and hugged them to her to ward off the momentary cold. "What did Art mean?" she wondered. Make Trevor disappear? Surely he didn't mean to kill Trevor. Elena shook her head. No, of course, the great Art Crowley would never get his hands dirty -- or in this case, get blood on his hands. He'd have one of his minions do his dirty work for him, as always. Or perhaps he'd arrange for some kind of anonymous hit on Trevor, something that couldn't be traced back to Art.

Elena stood and paced around Art's office for a few minutes. Then she pulled her cell phone out of her slacks pocket and touched the icon for her assistant. Maribel picked up on the first ring, efficient as ever.

"Hi, boss," came Maribel's chipper voice over the phone. "How's DC?"

Elena shook her head as she answered, "Same old, same old. Listen, I'm going to be out of the office for a few days. I have some personal business I have to attend to."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Maribel asked.

"Yes, there is. I'll give Todd a call and let him know what's up. But if you could put a message on my voice mail and e-mail saying I'm out of the office for a few days and refer anything urgent to Sam." Sam was the assistant vice president who served as backup to Elena.

"Will do," Maribel said. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Get me on the first available flight to Rivermont and book a hotel somewhere near the airport. You can e-mail the details to me when you have it set up."

"I'll take care of it, boss. I hope everything works out for you."

"Thanks, Maribel. Talk to you soon." Elena ended the call and went upstairs to pack. But instead, when she got to her suite, she kicked off her shoes and lay down across the king-sized bed. Her head was pounding with an incipient headache. She had to deal with Art. She had to deal with this situation.

She sat up and once again called Julia Dennison. This time she didn't mind that Julia wasn't answering. She left a message for Julia, saying that she was on her way to Rivermont and would call when she arrived, either late tonight or sometime tomorrow, depending on what flights were heading to Rivermont from DC.

After she ended the message, she saw she had a text from Maribel. "No flights out tonight. I'll e-mail info to you as soon as I confirm a flight for tomorrow morning."

Elena groaned. She didn't want to spend another night in this monster's mansion. But it was what it was. She heard a loud whirring noise outside and went over to the window to see what it was. A huge private helicopter was landing on a helipad at one side of the house. She watched as Art Crowley emerged from the house and headed to the helicopter, followed by two tall muscular men. The men carried several small duffels, a briefcase and a laptop case. Art and the two men boarded the helicopter, and a moment later, the aircraft began to ascend.

**Chapter 19**  
**Jack and Julia**  
**Wednesday**  
**May 15**

After leaving the police station, Julia walked across the street to her office at City Hall. She decided she might as well take some time to finalize a few details on an upcoming city event. And she wanted some time away from the Trevor situation.

When she walked into her office, her assistant Penny greeted her with a big grin and a hearty "Hi, boss."

"Hi yourself," Julia responded. "Good to be here. I've been working at home too much. I miss seeing your cheery face -- and the faces of everybody else here."

"Everybody?" Penny asked with mischievous look on her face.

"Well," Julia drawled, then grinned at Penny. "Bring your notes into my office when you get a chance and we'll wrap up the final details on this event."

"Yes, boss," Penny said as Julia went into her office.

Julia turned back and said, "Please don't call me boss. You know we're colleagues, not boss and employee."

"Yes, boss," Penny replied. Julia shook her head as she walked into her office.

Her first action was to call Lee. Julia told Lee she would pick the kids up from soccer practice later in the afternoon. They chatted for a few minutes, then after they ended the call, Julia felt a fair measure of guilt about all the things she'd left unsaid to her daughter. In her heart, she knew the time had come to tell Lee the truth about her father, no matter how difficult that would be for Julia to do.

An hour and a half later, Julia wrapped up the last of her work. She stretched her arms over her head, then stood up from her desk and walked over to the window. She looked out over the city, admiring the view of the river and the skyscrapers lining the city skyline. She liked her city and liked her job. It was fun and interesting and yet felt like she was doing something for the community, giving back.

As she stood at the window, she felt the burden of what was going on with Trevor March. Could he really be alive? Their break-up and Trev's subsequent death had been devastating for her. She had struggled long and hard over ending her relationship with Trevor. But she couldn't stand his friendship with Art Crowley.

Trev had tried to justify his dedication to Art. He'd told Julia about Crowley saving his life. He'd told her about all that Art had done for him, when they were boys growing up. Trev's mother had been a single mom who worked as a housekeeper for the Crowley family. Trev had trailed around after Art, wearing his hand-me-downs, doing his homework for him, generally just being his poor friend.

Julia had argued mightily against Trev's attachment to his childhood friend but had gotten nowhere. Trev insisted that down deep Art had a good heart. Julia had hooted with laughter at that. She'd never told Trev

how Art had tried to force her to have sex with him. She'd been afraid that Trev wouldn't believe her and that would have broken her heart.

As she thought about her past actions, reactions and inactions, Julia felt an overwhelming sadness and regret at the things she'd done and the things she'd left undone. Looming over everything was not telling Lee the truth about who her father was.

At the time Julia broke up with Trevor and left DC, she didn't know she was pregnant. Lee's conception had evidently happened the last time they slept together, right before the big blowup. After Lee's birth, Julia had decided that it would be better for her daughter if she invented a father who would be revered rather than one who would be regretted. Thus, she invented the serviceman who lost his life serving his country. That was the story she'd told everyone, including her mother. Everyone, that is, except for Elena Estes. Elena had been the only one Julia confided in. And sharing that secret with Elena had been a great regret for Julia.

She hadn't intended to tell her once-upon-a-time best-friend about the pregnancy. Thirty-plus years ago, Elena had called to tell Julia about Trevor March's death. Julia had just found out the day before that she was pregnant, and she knew that of course it was Trevor's baby. She broke down sobbing on the phone and had eventually confessed to Elena that she was pregnant with Trevor's child.

Elena had been stunned and had asked Julia what she was going to do.

"I'm going to have the baby, of course," Julia had replied. "And I'll raise him or her with all the love I have in me. But I'll never let my child know what a rotten human being his or her father was."

Elena had tried to defend Trevor to Julia, telling her that perhaps Trevor wasn't as bad as he appeared. But Julia refused to listen to Elena's defense and had abruptly ended their phone conversation. That had been the last time the two had spoken until a few days ago, 30 plus years later, when Julia reached out to Elena to tell her she thought Trevor March was still alive.

Now, standing in her office at City Hall, Julia put aside her thoughts of the past, and decided it was time to pack up and go home. She gathered up her phone, laptop, briefcase and purse and headed out her office door. Her assistant Penny must have had the same idea as Julia because she too had packed up her things and was standing by Julia's door.

"I was just coming in to say good-night," Penny said.

"And I was just coming out to say good-night," Julia said.

They both laughed and Julia said, "Great minds and all that."

As they both headed toward the outer office door, Julia's cell phone rang. She pulled it out of her pocket and said, "Go ahead, Penny. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Penny said, "Good-night, boss."

Julia gave her the evil eye and said a reciprocal "Good-night."

As Penny closed the office door, Julia answered the phone call, not paying any attention to who the caller was.

"Julia Dennison," she said into the cell automatically.

"Jack Carruthers," came the answering voice.

"Jack! I've been waiting to hear from you. Have you talked to your FBI friend yet?"

"As a matter of fact, I have. I just got off the phone with him. That's why I'm calling you," Jack said.

"So? Is he willing to talk to us?" Julia asked.

"Us?" Jack asked, a teasing note in his voice.

"Yes, us. You know he'll want to hear me tell the story, with all the details, not a secondhand version from you," Julia teased back.

"Secondhand? I don't think I've ever been called secondhand about anything," Jack said.

"You know what they say. There's always a first time for everything," Julia said. "So where and when? And who?"

"What are you talking about?" Jack asked, confusion clearly in his voice. Then evidently a light bulb went off in his head and he said, "Oh! Of course! You're asking where and when are we meeting who."

"So?" Julia asked.

"My FBI friend's name is Hank David. He's meeting us at my office in one hour, if by chance, you're available," Jack said.

"Of course, I'm available," Julia said. "If it's all right, I'll come over right away. I was just leaving the office when you called."

"Sure, come ahead. We can strategize while we wait," Jack said.

"Strategize? What would we strategize about? I'm just going to tell your friend everything I know about this situation," Julia said.

They ended the call and Julia headed to the elevator and then out of City Hall. It only took a few minutes for her to reach her car in the parking garage and drive the few blocks to Jack's office building. As she drove, she used the car's Bluetooth to call Lee. "Hi, sweetie," Julia said when Lee answered. "A thousand apologies but I'm not going to be able to pick the kids up from soccer practice this afternoon. Something came up, and I'm still downtown, and I'll be here for awhile."

"Not a problem, Mom," Lee said. "I'm not doing anything. I'm still in the throes of this wretched writers' block. You want to come for dinner? We're having spaghetti."

"Thanks for the invite but I can't. I don't know how long this thing is going to take," Julia said.

"What's the thing?" Lee asked.

"Oh, you know, one of my usual boring meetings. I'll talk to you later. And I'll definitely be able to take care of the kids tomorrow morning." Penny and Paul had a day off from school the next day, and Julia had volunteered to have them come over to her house while Lee met with her editor.

Julia ended the call and felt a pang of guilt over the fact that she hadn't been thoroughly forthcoming with her daughter. She promised herself she'd give Lee the full story as soon as she could, including the truth about her father. She dreaded that discussion. She didn't know how Lee would react to the lies Julia had told her over the years. She had lied with the best of intentions, not wanting to burden Lee with a sketchy father. But

now she was seeing the error of her ways. She'd learned through the years that honesty was the best policy, no matter what. But she'd shied away from honesty with Lee about her actual parentage. So now the time had come for her to 'fess up.

At Jack's office building, she found a parking spot close to the entrance. The parking was metered, and she dug through her purse for quarters. Her wallet yielded one, the bottom of her purse another. She rummaged through the console and came up with a third quarter. She got out of her car, locked it with the key fob and deposited the three quarters into the parking meter. Then she did a double take, thinking, "No way!" The parking meter took debit and credit cards. "Good to know," Julia murmured under her breath.

She rode up in the elevator with a UPS delivery man and gave him a smile and a wave when he got off at the floor before hers. At Jack's floor, she made a quick stop at the rest room before going to his office. She gazed at herself in the mirror, discouraged at how pale and tired she looked. She whipped out her make-up bag and quickly touched up her make-up and then ran a brush through her hair. Looking at her watch, she saw she still had half an hour before Jack's FBI friend was due. She left the rest room and went down the hall to Jack's office. Inside the reception room, Della was at her desk, talking on the phone and tapping away at her computer.

Della stopped typing, waved at Julia and motioned her to one of the chairs in the waiting area. She quickly ended the phone call, then buzzed Jack on the intercom. Julia could hear his voice booming, "Send her in."

Della stood and walked over to Julia. "Hi, girl," she said. "As you heard, the great man said to send you in."

Julia stood and reached out to hug Della. "Good to see you. How are things going?"

"Oh, you know," Della said. "As good as can be expected."

At that, the door to Jack's office opened, and he stood there grinning at the two women. "I should have known there would be girl talk to blame for the delay in Julia coming in to my office."

"See you later, Della," Julia said and turned to enter Jack's office. He followed behind Julia and closed the office door behind him. Inside the office, Jack gestured to the conference table. Julia took a seat and Jack sat down across the table from her.

"Can I get you something? Coffee? Water?" Jack offered.

"No, I'm good," Julia said. "Although I am missing a spaghetti dinner at Lee and Casey's house."

"Well, I can top that. After this meeting, we'll grab a bite at Tony's," Jack said.

Julia looked at him in mock astonishment, open mouth, wide eyes and all. "Tony's? You don't grab a bite at Tony's. That's the most elegant restaurant in Rivermont. It's got five stars from Michelin, or something like that."

"Well, I'd enjoy taking the most elegant woman I know to the most elegant restaurant. So is it a date?" Jack asked.

Julia felt a rush of happiness at his words and wondered what was going on. She and Jack had been friends forever but there had never been anything romantic between them. Now there seemed to be. Julia hesitated a moment before answering Jack's invitation. Then another rush of happiness went through her, and she thought, 'What the hell! Go for it, girl!'

"That sounds perfect, Jack," she said, her eyes sparkling and a wide smile on her face.

Jack smiled back and nodded. Then Della's voice came over the intercom saying, "Hank David is here."

Jack stood and walked over and opened the door. "Come in, Hank," he boomed. A tall dark-haired man appeared in the doorway and stretched out a hand to Jack. The two men came into the office and Jack led Hank over to the conference table.

"Julia, this is my good friend, Special Agent Hank David," Jack said. "Hank, this is my son's delightful mother-in-law. Julia Dennison."

Julia extended her hand to Hank, and he shook it enthusiastically. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Dennison. I've heard so much about you from Jack and Casey. They seem to think you hung the moon."

Julia blushed as she said, "Oh, my, that's embarrassing." Then she added, "But, please, call me Julia."

"Hank, you made the lady blush. What were you thinking?" Jack teased.

Hank shook his head and said, "Sorry, I didn't mean to embarrass you. What do you say we sit down and get started."

The three of them sat down around the conference table. Hank turned to Julia and said, "Jack gave me a high level description of what's going on. But if you don't mind, I'd like a more detailed account from you."

"Certainly," Julia said. "But first, let me thank you for coming to talk to me and for not dismissing me as some whacko."

"Well, I certainly knew you weren't a whacko. You come with Jack's seal of approval and that's all I need. Now, let's get started. Just start from the beginning."

Julia took a deep breath and began her recitation. "It all started thirty plus years ago in Washington D.C. I was a college intern at an up and coming ad agency."

Julia continued with details about the agency and Art Crowley's firm as one of their clients. An hour later, she took another deep breath and said, "And that's the end. So the question is, is Trevor March still alive? And what does that mean? And how can we use all of this to make sure that Art Crowley gets nowhere near the White House?"

Hank David had been silent during Julia's narration but she noticed him scribbling notes on a yellow pad that Jack had provided. "We'll deal with your concerns in a moment. But first, I have a few questions."

Julia saw that he covered two pages of the yellow pad with his scrawling writing, surely adding up to more than a few questions.

Hank took a moment to scroll through his notes and questions on the yellow pad, then asked, "So it's your opinion that Crowley and March devised this scheme to fake March's death?"

Julia nodded and said, "Absolutely. If indeed Trevor is still alive, that has to be what happened. Trevor didn't have the money or the connections to make something like that happen. But Art Crowley certainly did. He inherited a massive fortune from his father. And the Crowleys have been part of the movers and shakers in DC forever."

"Hmmm," Hank murmured, then said, "Let's take this in a different direction. I'm just curious. What makes you think Crowley is planning to run for president?"

"Well, you remember me telling you about Elena Estes, my former colleague from the ad agency in DC?" Hank nodded, and Julia continued. "Elena and Art had an affair while she and I were at the agency. And I think it continued off and on over the years. So when I got in touch with her about the possibility of Trevor still being alive, one of the things she told me was that Art was in the midst of hot and heavy planning to jump into the presidential race. Her reaction was that if Trevor was alive, it could mean disaster for Art."

"Because?" Hank asked.

"As I said, Trevor being alive would mean there had to be a conspiracy between him and Art -- that the two men plotted together to fake Trevor's supposed death."

Hank asked Julia a few more questions about details in her story, then said, "I think I have enough information here. My first objective will be to find out whether or not Trevor March is alive. If he isn't, there's no conspiracy and no need for an investigation. What can you provide as far as where this Josh Walters lives and works, details like that?"

Julia reached down and picked up her handbag off the floor. She pulled out her wallet, which in her mind she still called by the old-fashioned word billfold and drew out a piece of paper. She looked at it for a second, then silently passed it over to Hank David.

Julia looked chagrined as she said, "This is the information from Josh Walters' business card and the seminar brochure. My daughter had it tucked in her iPad, and I copied down the information while she was out of the room."

He looked at the piece of paper, then said, "Jack?"

Jack said, "Julia already showed the information to me when we first met yesterday. I did some Google searches and verified that Josh Walters seems to be who he says he is -- a criminology university professor who specializes in stalking and who goes around the country delivering seminars on the topic." Jack opened a file folder sitting in front of him, and looked down at some notes in the folder. He thought about how to phrase what he was about to say. He didn't want to tell Hank or Julia that the information had come from one of Lee's secret sources. Finally, he said, "Some of the research turned up two other names or aliases that are somehow connected to Josh Walters. One was David Halsted. The other was," Jack paused, then continued, "wait for it, Trevor March."

"What?" Julia exclaimed. "You didn't tell me that."

Jack said, "I apologize. I didn't want to influence your telling your story to Hank. I thought it would be better to have you tell it just as you told it to me yesterday, with your uncertainty as to whether Josh Walters was indeed Trevor March."

"So," Hank said, letting the word linger in the air. "We can assume that Josh Walters is indeed Trevor March, with a new identity." He thought for a moment, then continued. "Chances are, the man believed he was safe from discovery, especially after 30 years or so."

Julia sat there motionless, distressed by the realization that Trevor March was indeed alive. Never in a million years would she have thought that possible. And Lee had met him, talked to him, not knowing that he was her father.

Fifteen minutes later, Julia and Jack sat alone in Jack's office. Hank David had left, promising to get back to them with updates. Julia sat slumped in her chair, head down, eyes closed, lost in thought. Jack looked at her, concern for the woman in his face. Finally, he spoke, his words soft and his tone gentle. "Julia, what is it? You can tell me."

Julia raised her head and looked at Jack. He could see tears brimming in her eyes. He reached in his back pocket and drew out a crisp white handkerchief. His wife Mary had made sure he carried a handkerchief with him, and now, 10 years after her death, he still shoved a handkerchief in his back pocket every day.

Jack handed the handkerchief across the table to Julia, and she took it with a smile. "You're always prepared, aren't you?"

Jack smiled back and said, "Mary trained me well."

Julia dabbed at her eyes, then clutched the handkerchief in both hands as she spoke. "Jack, there's something I haven't told you. I haven't told anyone but my friend Elena."

Jack looked at Julia and nodded. "I think I know what it is." He paused, then continued. "Trevor March is Lee's father?" He said it like a question but he and Julia both knew it was more of a statement than a question.

"Yes," Julia answered slowly. She thought for a moment, then said, "When I broke things off with Trev and left DC, I had no idea I was pregnant. I was an emotional wreck when I got home and when I missed a period, I thought it was because of the turmoil I was going through. Then, hearing about Trev's death, well, his supposed death, I sank into a deep depression. I was almost three months pregnant when I finally figured out what was going on. For awhile, I wasn't sure what to do. I would never have gotten an abortion but giving up the baby for adoption did cross my mind." Julia stopped and blew her nose on the handkerchief and grinned at Jack as she said, "I'll return this after I've laundered it."

Jack reached out and squeezed Julia's hand as she continued her story.

"As soon as I realized I was pregnant, I invented a secret husband in the military. I told my mother I'd kept it a secret because I thought she would disapprove. But when I discovered I was pregnant, I knew I had to tell her the truth," Julia said.

Jack gave her a questioning look as he asked, "And she believed you?"

Julia smiled and said, "You've never met my mother. She is the sweetest, kindest person in the world. She doesn't -- or didn't-- have a suspicious bone in her body. So of course she believed me." Julia paused, using Jack's handkerchief to dab at a lone tear rolling down her cheek.

"I wish you could have met her before the onset of Alzheimer's. You would have loved her," Julia said.

"I'm sure I would still love her," Jack said. "To have raised such a wonderful daughter, she surely is a wonderful woman."

"Thank you for those kind words," Julia said, still dabbing at her tears.

"What were you going to do when your soldier husband didn't come stateside for the birth of his child?" Jack asked.



"Well, I supposedly received a Dear John letter before I told him about the baby. So the marriage ended before it began," Julia said.

"And your mother never suspected anything?" Jack asked.

"Like I said, she didn't have a suspicious bone in her body. I felt awful deceiving her like that but I was trying to protect the baby. In the end, it all worked out. I got my so-called divorce, and Lee and I lived with my mother until I was able to buy a house. Then Mom came to live with us. It was an ideal life for us, having my mother living with us. When Lee was older, I told her the story of a marriage to a soldier that didn't work out. When she was in college, she wanted to try to find him. That caused a problem for me. I thought about telling her the truth but decided that having a father who killed a model and then himself was not a good legacy for Lee," Julia said, her head down and her voice soft.

"I can understand that," Jack said. "So what did you tell Lee?"

"Something that I'm not very proud of. I made up a name and a fictitious background. She did some searching around and never came up with anything. After awhile, she just gave up on her search and never mentioned it again. I sometimes wonder if she suspected that I wasn't telling her the truth. But sweetheart that she is, she never confronted me about it," Julia said.

Jack hesitated before asking, "Does the current situation change things?"

Julia shook her head slightly and said, "I don't know. I guess maybe it does. With Trevor alive and with Elena's theory that Art Crowley killed the model and not Trevor, it certainly seems to change things."

"So what's your next step?" Jack asked.

"I don't know. I guess I'll wait till we hear something back from Hank David. If he locates Trevor and it really is Trevor, then I suppose I'll tell Lee the whole story. I just hope she doesn't hate me for all the lies I've told her. I meant it for the best. It was never my intention to deceive anyone. I just wanted to protect Lee," Julia said.

Jack stood up and stretched. "Okay, madam. Ready for dinner? Tony's awaits."

"Oh, Jack, I don't know. I'm not really in the mood--" Jack interrupted her with, "I won't take no for an answer. It's been a long time since I had a fancy dinner with a beautiful woman. You're not going to deprive me of that, are you?"

Julia smiled up at Jack, then stood up and said, "How can I refuse such an offer? Show me the way to restroom so I can do repairs, and then we'll be on our way."

Half an hour later, the maitre d' at Tony's seated Jack and Julia at a banquette table with a view of the restaurant. Julia was fascinated with observing the other diners. Already she'd spotted the mayor, a Federal judge and a university chancellor. "This really was the place the movers and shakers dined," she thought.

While they were waiting for their appetizers, Julia's phone tinged. She pulled it from her handbag and looked at the screen. It was Elena again. Julia had ignored Elena's previous texts and voice mails, and she was tempted to ignore this message also. But a small voice in her head said, "Listen to the message."

Julia held up her phone to Jack and said, "I apologize but I'm going to listen to this message from Elena Estes. Something is telling me it's important for me to find out what she has to say."

"Please, go ahead," Jack said. "I trust your intuition."

Julia grinned at him, then began to listen to Elena's voice mail. Elena's voice was ragged, and she sounded out of breath.

"Julia, it's me. I hope you get this message. It's literally a matter of life and death. Before he left, Art told me he's going to take care of Trevor once and for all. I think he intends to have Trev killed. We have to stop him. I'm flying into Rivermont on Thursday morning. I'll call you when I get to town."

Julia handed her phone to Jack, saying, "Please listen to the last voice mail."

Jack listened and looked at Julia with shock. He listened once more, then handed the phone back to Julia.

"I don't believe it," Julia said. "What is going on here?"

"If you're right about Crowley intending to run for the Senate and then eventually the presidency, I can see why he'd want to get rid of Trevor March, once and for all, as your friend phrased it. What do you think she meant by 'before he left'?"

"I'm assuming she meant that Art left his estate. Shall I call her and find out?" Julia asked.

Jack nodded, "I think you'd better. But let's have our dinner first, okay?"

"Sounds good to me," Julia said.

An hour later, Jack and Julia left Tony's after one of the finer dinners either had ever had. Sitting in Jack's car in the parking lot adjacent to the restaurant, Julia took out her phone and called Elena. The phone rang twice, then Elena picked up. Julia put the phone on speaker so Jack could listen in on the call.

"Julia! Thank you so much for calling me back. I'm desperate here;" Elena said, her tone frantic.

"Where are you?" Julia asked.

"I'm still at Art's estate. I have a flight to Rivermont in the morning. Art left on his helicopter this afternoon. I have no idea where he's going but I think he's planning to get rid of Trevor. I heard him on the phone putting together a search for Trevor. And if anybody can find Trev, it will be Art. He has resources and contacts that you wouldn't believe. Julia, we have to do something. We have to stop him."

"Yes, I definitely agree," Julia said. "I've contacted law enforcement here in Rivermont, and they've involved the FBI."

"Thank God!" Elena said. "I didn't know what we should do but it sounds like you do."

"Let's hope," Julia said. "Now, let's talk about where you're going to stay when you get in tomorrow."

"It's all taken care of. My assistant booked a room for me at the Marriott by the airport," Elena said.

"Nonsense," Julia responded. "You're going to stay with me." She gave Elena her address, then said, "Take a cab or Uber from the airport. I'd come pick you up but I have the grandchildren tomorrow morning. My daughter Lee has a meeting with her editor first thing in the morning, and the children have a day off school. Lee will pick them up at noon."

Elena protested, saying she didn't want to be a bother or inconvenience Julia. Julia said nonsense again, then added, "It's settled. I'll see you tomorrow morning," and ended the call.

"So?" Jack said.

"That's what I say, so?" Julia echoed.

They sat there in silence for a moment, then Jack asked, "Do you trust your friend?"

Julia hesitated before answering, considering her response. "I think I do. I think she's as determined as I am to make sure Art Crowley never gets anywhere near the White House. But we've been out of touch for 30 years so I'm not sure I really know who she is anymore."

"Good to know," Jack said. "Let's just play it as it lays. If you get a chance, give me a call in the morning and let me know how things go with your friend. Also, I'll call Hank first thing in the morning and see where he is on the investigation so maybe I'll have an update for you," Jack said.

"Thank you so much, Jack, for all your help on this. I'm sorry to have dumped it all on you and Casey but I didn't know what else to do."

"Not to worry," Jack said with a grin. "What else are in-laws for?"

Julia gave him a light punch on the arm, then put her cell phone back in her handbag.

"Ready to go home?" Jack asked.

"Yes, although I'm sorry for the evening to end. I've had a wonderful time. The dinner was delicious, and the company was divine," Julia said.

"Wow!" Jack said. "I've never been called divine. I could get used to that."

They both laughed as Jack started the car and pulled out of the parking lot.

An hour later, Julia climbed into bed and sat propped against the headboard, not ready to go to sleep yet. She closed her eyes and thought back over the evening with Jack. Dinner had been so enjoyable. As she and Jack had talked, she had slowly begun to realize how much she liked him. He was intelligent, interesting, kind, gentle, and of course, handsome. She smiled to herself as she remembered the funny stories he'd told her about Casey's antics when he was growing up, stories she'd never heard. She wondered if Casey had ever shared those same stories with Lee. She hoped so. The stories demonstrated what a little character Casey had been, and still was, and also what loving parents Mary and Jack Carruthers were.

Julia couldn't remember a more pleasant evening. Even though she and Jack had known each for years, she felt like she'd never really known him before tonight. As she drifted off to sleep, the smile stayed on her face.

Julia's cell phone rang at 9:15 the next morning. She'd been up at seven. After showering and dressing, she'd baked muffins for Penny and Paul's visit. She ate one of them, just to test it, of course, then finished off her breakfast with yogurt and berries.

The call had been from Elena, saying she'd just landed at Rivermont airport and would be at Julia's house shortly. Julia went into the guest bedroom to make sure everything was in order. The room had twin beds for Penny and Paul's sleepovers at their grandma's house. The room also had an antique dressing table with a matching chest. Two matching cedar chests served as toy boxes for Penny and Paul. A loveseat and end table in front of the double windows offered an inviting seating area. The adjacent bathroom was filled with green plants and a skylight. Julia looked around, satisfied with the room and sure that Elena would be comfortable there during her stay.

She heard voices coming from the kitchen and quickly headed that way to welcome her daughter and grandchildren. Hugs were given all around, then Julia settled Penny and Paul on the high stools at the kitchen counter and served them blueberry muffins. Lee waved good-bye and grabbed a muffin on her way back home for her meeting with her editor. Julia stood by the counter, sipping coffee and talking to Penny and Paul.

"We're having a guest in a few minutes, a friend that I knew years ago. She has a very exciting job. She works for an airline and knows all about airplanes," Julia told them.

A few minutes later, the front door bell rang, and Julia went to answer the door, with Penny and Paul right behind her. Elena stood on the front porch, her suitcase behind her, and a taxi backing out of the driveway. Julia stood aside to let Elena in. As Elena pulled her wheeled suitcase up over the threshold, Paul spoke up and said, "Grandma, I could take the suitcase to the guest room."

"Go ahead, sweetie," Julia said. "If that's all right with you, Elena?"

"Certainly," Elena said. "I'd appreciate that."

Elena looked at Julia who immediately said, "Please forgive my poor manners. Elena, this is my granddaughter Penny and my grandson Paul. Penny and Paul, this is my friend Mrs. Estes." The three of them shook hands, and then Penny and Paul started toward the guest room with Paul dragging the suitcase behind him.

"They're adorable," Elena said, once Penny and Paul were out of the room.

Julia thought she could detect a note of longing in Elena's voice. Elena had never had children, and Julia hadn't thought she'd wanted children. But now she wondered.

"Come sit down and have coffee, and I made muffins," Julia said.

"Aren't you the domestic goddess," Elena teased.

"Not hardly," Julia said. "I manage to get by but that's as far as it goes."

Julia led the way to her kitchen and gestured to Elena to have a seat at the table. She put the muffins, a pot of coffee and two cups on a tray brought the tray over to the table. She sat down across from Elena and poured them each a cup of coffee.

At that moment, Penny and Paul came running back into the kitchen. "More muffins!" they called out in unison.

Julia laughed and stood up taking two muffins over to where Penny and Paul were perched on the high stools at the kitchen counter. "Milk?" Julia asked.

Penny and Paul nodded, their mouths full of blueberry muffins. Julia poured them each a glass of milk, then went back to her seat across from Elena. "I told Penny and Paul that you work for an airline and knew all about airplanes so be prepared to be bombarded with questions."

Elena grinned and said, "That will be fun. I look forward to it."

A few minutes later, Penny and Paul joined Julia and Elena at the kitchen table. Penny looked at Julia and asked, "Grandma, is it all right if we ask Mrs. Estes about airplanes?"

"Definitely, sweetie. I already told her you and Paul would have questions for her."

For the next hour or so, Penny and Paul did indeed bombard Elena with their questions. At one point in the interrogation, Elena excused herself to go get her laptop out of the guest room so she could show Penny and Paul pictures and videos of the airplanes they were questioning her about.

Julia sat back, enjoying the interplay between Penny and Paul and Elena. Her mind wandered back to the evening before with Jack, and she felt a warm feeling wash over her. Jack was the greatest, no doubt about it. She wondered what would happen between them, if anything. She hoped it would be something.

A few minutes later, Lee came through the kitchen door. She smiled when she saw her children at the table with Elena, leaning over her to look at the pictures on the laptop.

"What are you two up to?" Lee asked, coming to stand beside Penny and Paul.

"Oh, Mom. It's so great. Mrs. Estes is showing us all kinds of pictures and videos. And she's going to send some airplane stuff to us," Paul said, his excitement spilling over into his voice.

"It's truly great, Mom," Penny chimed in.

"Do we have to go? I don't want to go home. I want to stay here." Paul said.

"Sorry, guys, but it's time to go. We're going to have lunch with Daddy and then go to the zoo, remember?"

Penny and Paul fussed a bit more about wanting to stay and talk to Mrs. Estes but finally said their thanks and good-byes and left with Lee.

"Well," Julia said when the kitchen door closed behind Lee, Penny and Paul. "You were quite the success with my grandchildren."

"That was so much fun. They're delightful. How fortunate you are to have such a wonderful family," Elena said, a note of wistfulness in her voice, Julia thought.

"Elena, forgive me for such a personal question, but did you ever want to have children? You were so good with Penny and Paul. You would have been such a good mother."

Elena didn't answer for a long while, and Julia started to apologize for being so intrusive. But before Julia could speak, Elena said, "All these years, I've kept this from you. But now ..." her voice trailed off. Then she said, "I can't have children."

"Oh, Elena, I'm so sorry. I didn't know. Please forgive me for asking."

"Nonsense," Elena said. "I know all your secrets. It's time you know some of mine."

Julia stared at her friend, wondering what Elena's secrets could be.

"I've never talked much about my affair, if you could call it that, with Art. It started when you and I were interns at the ad agency. Art and I kept the affair a secret from everyone, although I think you suspected something was going on. You just didn't know for sure. It was an off and on thing that went on for years. We had one last fling before I left the agency and went to work for the airline. And wouldn't you know it, I got pregnant. Art wanted no part of a baby and insisted that I have an abortion."

Julia reached out and took Elena's hand as Elena continued her story.

"I didn't want an abortion. But I also didn't know how I'd fit a baby into my life. I was about to start my dream job as a stewardess with one of the top tier airlines. I would have had to give up that job. So I let Art talk me into an abortion. Abortions were legal by then, courtesy of Roe v. Wade. But Art was afraid the press would find out so he demanded that I go to Mexico for the abortion and use a false name. And best of all, he refused to come with me. He did make all the arrangements, including a charter flight and the best clinic he could find."

Julia patted Elena's hand and could feel her eyes swimming with tears.

"Of course, something went wrong. After the abortion, I began to hemorrhage and they were unable to stop the bleeding. So without my knowledge, they did a hysterectomy."

"Oh, no," Julia said and squeezed Elena's hand.

"Oh, yes. So now you know why I deeply and truly hate Art Crowley. He took away any chance I had to have a baby. And he did it offhandedly, without a thought."

The two women talked for a few more minutes about what Art had forced Elena to do, with disastrous results. Then Elena stood up and began pacing around Julia's kitchen.

"It's time to talk about what we do next," Elena said. "Tell me again where things stand with the law enforcement people you've talked with."

Julia gave Elena condensed versions of her meetings with Casey, Jack and Special Agent Hank David. "At the moment, the ball is in Agent David's court, so to speak. He told us that his main objective would be to first locate Trevor. He needs to see Trevor for himself, to know that the man is indeed alive. Then he needs to question Trevor about his faked death and whether Art Crowley was involved in that scheme."

"Have you had any updates?" Elena asked.

"Yes, Jack texted me that Agent David was unable to locate Trevor in the town where he supposedly lives. It's in the state of Washington, right on the Canadian border. The university where he's a professor of criminology says he's on a sabbatical. They gave Agent David his contact information but so far David hasn't been able to track him down."

"So we're at a standstill?" Elena asked.

"Yes, it certainly looks that way," Julia said.

Elena yawned and stood up. "I haven't gotten enough sleep in the past few days. I thought I'd sleep on the plane but I didn't. Would it be all right if I took one of my "power" naps, just for a few minutes?"

"Of course. I'm so sorry. Please, sleep as long as you want, as long as you can. I think you have everything you need in your room but let me know if I can get you anything," Julia said, standing up and coming over to hug her friend.

Julia and Elena left the kitchen and walked down the hall to the guest room. Elena went inside and closed the door behind her. Julia stood in the hall for a moment, thinking, then went into the bedroom that she'd made into a home office. She closed the door and sat down at her desk, positioned in front of a double bank of windows. Behind her house was a tree-filled lot, giving the impression that the house was in the woods. Off in the distance she could see the walkway along the high cliffs overlooking the Mississippi.

She took her cell phone out of her pocket and called Jack. To her surprise, he answered on the first ring. She knew he was a busy man and had anticipated leaving a voice mail for him.

"Hi!" she said into the phone, obvious surprise in her voice. "I thought I'd get your voice mail."

"You mean you don't want to talk to me?" Jack teased.

"Don't be silly," Julia said. "Of course I want to talk to you. Elena is here, and I filled her in on where things stand. I can't give you any details but her hatred of Art Crowley goes even deeper than I suspected. She's out for blood. Somehow I need to keep a close eye on her till this nightmare is resolved. Heaven knows what she might do."

**Chapter 20**  
**Trevor March**  
**Wednesday Midnight**  
**May 15**

It had been almost midnight on Tuesday when Trevor March boarded the Greyhound bus in the small town on the Canadian border. He was now halfway through his two-day journey that would end in Rivermont. It had been more than 40 years since he'd last been on a bus, back in his college days. He had brought with him a small duffel and a backpack. When he got on the bus, he had shoved both of them under the seat near the rear of the bus, opting for a window seat. The bus had been nearly empty with only about a dozen passengers.

He wore a ball cap pulled down low on his forehead, along with his reading glasses, hoping that was enough of a disguise to fool anyone looking for him. Hoping to fool Art Crowley's goons, he corrected himself.

The driver closed the bus doors with a whoosh and turned to address the passengers. He was a heavyset man with graying hair and a moustache and goatee to match. Seeing the driver's facial hair, Trevor was glad he'd decided to let his beard grow, another piece of his disguise.

"Welcome aboard, ladies and gents. My name is Tyler Strong, and I'll be your driver as far as the Black Hills. Hope you enjoy the journey." With that, Tyler Strong turned and headed to his driver's cubby.

Trevor glanced around the bus, taking in each of his fellow passengers. None of them looked like one of Art's people but you could never be sure about things like that.

He leaned back in the seat and pulled the ball cap down further, blotting out the bus's overhead lights. He tried to clear his mind of its cacophony of thoughts so he could sleep. He hadn't had a decent night's sleep since his visit to Rivermont or maybe it was since he read the online article with the rumor that Art Crowley was preparing for a presidential run.

In Rivermont, he'd had the shock of his life when he met Lee Carruthers and her husband Casey. Lee was the spitting image of his older sister Delilah, who'd died long ago. Once the seminar was over and he was alone in his hotel room, he'd gotten on the Internet to do some searching, or more appropriately, some stalking.

He'd quickly found what he was looking for. Lee Carruthers was Julia Dennison's daughter. And that meant that Lee Carruthers was his daughter. All these years he'd kept tabs on Julia from a distance but had never seen a picture of her daughter. In her online bio on the city's website, he'd read about her being widowed. The bio said her late husband had been in the military and had died serving his country. The article mentioned a daughter but hadn't given her name or date of birth or any information about her. Once he saw Lee and saw her uncanny resemblance to Delilah, Trevor put two and two together and quickly came up with his certainty that he was Lee's father.

After his Rivermont seminar trip was completed, he'd gone back home, undecided about what to do. He'd been living a lie for 30 years. He had a daughter. He couldn't wrap his mind around that fact. It meant so much to him.

For years, he'd thought he was alone in the world, except for some distant cousins he'd never really known. His parents had died when he and Delilah were in college, and Delilah had died a few years later. After Delilah's death, he'd felt an overwhelming desolation at being without a family. When Delilah died, he'd been living in DC. He and Art Crowley had started a lobbying firm and were having a surprising success with the business. He had fallen in love with a beautiful young copywriter at the ad agency he and Art had commissioned to work for them.



Julia Dennison had been a lifesaver for him. Loving her and feeling her love him in return had lifted him out of the depression that he'd sunk into. They'd only had a few months together before everything fell apart but those months had been the best time of his life.

On the bus Trevor sat up in the seat and stretched. It looked like another sleepless night for him. He gazed at the dark countryside outside and tried to put the whole Julia and Lee thing out of his mind. Instead, he turned his thoughts to Art Crowley. Art had destroyed his life, he thought. But then he amended that with the thought that he'd been a willing, even active, participant.

When the whole Art fiasco went down, Julia had just broken up with him and had left DC without a word. He was broken-hearted and felt a hopelessness that consumed him. Art had insisted he attend the river cruise, telling him it would be good for what ailed him. He said it would be a fun party and good for business.

Trevor had had a love/hate relationship with Art even before Art saved his life. He knew Art was basically lacking in morals and ethics. Art was engaged to the daughter of a senator but routinely cheated on her, careful to keep his infidelities well hidden.

Natalia had been the latest in a long line of Art's flings. Trevor had only met her once before the river cruise. He'd stopped by Art's townhouse to deliver some papers, and Natalia had been there. Art introduced her offhandedly, calling her a friend, just a friend, much to Trevor's embarrassment.

Trevor had always strongly suspected that Natalia's death wasn't the tragic accident that Art claimed it was. He knew Art had a vicious temper and could be rough when he was angered.

When Art had come to tell him about Natalia's death, Trevor had had too much to drink, and he certainly wasn't thinking coherently. But after awhile, he eventually succumbed to Art's entreaties and had agreed to take the fall for her death and to fake his own death. With Julia gone, he didn't have anything to live for anyway. At one point, he'd been tempted to take the plunge off the deck of Art's yacht into the Potomac instead of hiding in the engine room storage area.

Art kept Trevor hidden until the police had released the yacht as a potential crime scene. He sneaked Trevor off the yacht and took him to a ratty motel outside DC. Then, once all the hue and cry over Natalia's death and Trevor's supposed suicide had died down, Art had arranged passage on a Seattle-bound freighter for him. Art had secured two new identities for Trevor and had deposited a fortune for him in an offshore account in the Seychelles. Their agreement had been for Trevor to disappear and to never contact Art again.

Trevor had done just that. When he eventually arrived in Seattle, after a horrendous, seasick voyage, he'd traveled to a town near the Canadian border. Using his false identity and papers, he'd enrolled in a university near the border and studied criminology, a secret passion of his. He'd only gotten into lobbying because Art dragged him along with him. He'd quickly earned a Master's in criminology, followed by his doctorate. He'd accepted a position from the university as a teaching assistant. He'd then worked his way up to lecturer and then to tenured assistant professor. Finally, he'd become a full professor.

Along the way, he'd developed an interest in stalking, and it had easily become his specialty. Over the years, he'd written two books on the subject, books that had been well-received by the law enforcement community. The books had led to book tours that had evolved into his seminar tours. The university had encouraged his outside-the-classroom activities and supported his books and his seminars.

His life had been a quiet one. He'd dated on and off and had had a couple love affairs. But nothing lasted. He decided he was meant to be a loner and was fine with that. He'd always deeply regretted the break-up with Julia. She had been the one true love of his life. But when she'd demanded that he give up his business and his friendship with Art Crowley, he'd balked. He'd told Julia about Art saving his life and how, for that reason, he couldn't abandon Art, no matter what.

Losing Julia had been the hardest thing he'd ever gone through. She'd refused to reveal to him why she was so adamantly opposed to his friendship with Art. Trevor had talked to Julia's best friend, Elena Estes, trying to see if Elena knew why Julia hated Art. But Elena either didn't know or wouldn't tell. At the time, she was one of several girls Art kept on a string, out of sight of his fiancée, the senator's daughter.

And so Julia had disappeared from Trevor's life. He'd kept tabs on her through the years, stalking her at a distance. The Internet had made his stalking infinitely easier. Before Google and Yahoo, he'd subscribed to the Rivermont Times. From the newspaper, he'd learned she worked for the city of Rivermont and had gotten his name added to the newsletter the city published weekly.

Now here he was on a Greyhound bus heading east. His first stop would be Rivermont to confront Julia. Then he would head to DC to handle Art Crowley once and for all. He wasn't sure what that entailed but one thing he was positive about: Art Crowley was never going to be allowed to run for president.

**Chapter 21**  
**Art Crowley**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

Art Crowley alighted from his helicopter at the private airport 20 miles from his estate. He walked across the tarmac to where his Gulfstream was waiting. The two employees who accompanied him on the flight had gotten off the helicopter before Art and now stood next to the airstair leading up to the Gulfstream's open door. One, the taller one, had Art's rolling suitcase trailing behind him; he turned and headed up the airstair. The other man, the younger one, was carrying Art's heavy-duty combination laptop case and briefcase and followed behind his colleague.

Both men, Zach the taller and Devon the younger, were former military, former mercenaries, now in the employ of one of the world's wealthiest men.

Art had specifically recruited these two men because of their unusual, even unique, sets of skills. Earlier in their careers, both men had served more than one military enlistment. Then upon their discharges, they'd opted for the world of the mercenary. During their time in the military, they'd worked in the technology area and had developed both legal and illegal skills and expertise.

Art had used a confidential recruiting firm to find just the right men for the two positions he wanted to fill. The perfect candidates had to have a military background and extensive investigative experience. Most important, however, was the requirement for their technical background. They needed to be computer experts, to know their way around the most sophisticated computer systems. But the most vital prerequisite had to do with the moral make-up of the ideal candidates.

Art instructed the recruiting firm to find men (or women) who were compromised, who had some deep, dark secret in their pasts that could be used to manipulate them.

It had taken the recruiting firm almost a year to find first Zach and then Devon. They'd presented candidate after candidate to Art but none of them had met with his approval. When the recruiting firm first contacted Zach and Devon, neither man would agree to an interview, each expressing their contentment with their current employment in the cyber operations of a top level private military company.

The recruiting firm had finally convinced Zach to at least meet with Art Crowley. The recruiter had said "Wouldn't you like to turn down the offer in person?"

Zach met with Art and listened to what the man had to say but had then firmly refused the offer of employment. Art, never one to give up on something he wanted, had arranged for another session with Zach, and at that time, had shared his political aspirations, telling the man of his presidential ambitions. He'd also offered Zach a starting salary of half a million dollars a year, plus an array of benefits. That offer had gotten the man's attention. He'd asked for a couple of days to think it over. Then Art brought out the big guns.

"Zach, I would give my offer serious consideration," Art had said with a knowing smile on his face.

"I will, Mr. Crowley," Zach responded, starting to rise from his seat in front of Art's desk.

"The reason I say you should give my offer serious consideration is that if you don't, I have information I could share with the private military company that would immediately end your career there and lead to your arrest and incarceration." Art stared at the man, waiting for his reaction.

Zach turned a deep red and stuttered as he said, "I-I don't know what-what you're talking about."

Art just continued to stare at the man, waiting for his inevitable capitulation.

"How did you find out?" Zach asked. "I thought --

Art interrupted with "I'm very good at unearthing deep, dark secrets. And I must compliment you how deeply you buried your secret. But nonetheless, it did emerge. I discovered that you managed to earn almost a million dollars by selling proprietary information to one of your competitors."

Zach stood and looked down at Art. "I'll give a month's notice to the company and start then." He turned and walked out of the room, head down.

Art next made the same half a million dollars a year offer to Devon and to his delight, got an immediate acceptance from the more materialistic of the two candidates.

However, Art made sure Devon knew that Art was aware of a mysterious death in his past. "You know, Devon, you were extremely fortunate that the private military company you work for never learned that you were responsible for the death of one of your colleagues. It would have been awkward if they'd discovered you had a reason to silence Alta Washburn."

Devon had shaken his head and said, "Whatever. I'll give notice and let you know my start date." He left Art's office and slammed the door behind him.

Zach and Devon knew each other from the cyber operations of the private military company they both worked for, although they worked in different areas. The day after Art's offer to Zach, he ran into Devon in the cafeteria at work, and they had lunch together. Zach, asking for confidentiality, told Devon that he'd had an offer from a private individual at an unbelievable salary. Devon had said, "I think I got the same offer. Art Crowley?"

"Yeah, Art Crowley," Zach replied. "Did you take the offer?"

"Yeah," Devon said. "Who could turn down half a million dollars a year?" But there was no enthusiasm in his voice. The two men looked at one another, each wondering if the other man was also being blackmailed into working for Art Crowley.

The two men each gave a month's notice to the private military company and joined Crowley Enterprises on the same day. They'd undergone extensive training on the Crowley systems and had been shown the ins and outs of the multi-billion-dollar conglomerate Art Crowley owned. Art was upfront with Zach and Devon, telling them he needed their absolute commitment and loyalty. He told them he expected complete compliance with his orders, no questions asked. Both Zach and Devon realized that meant Crowley was going to expect some shady work from them.

Now, the two men had been working non-stop for the past two days to locate Trevor March, who was now using the alias Josh Walters. They'd found that he lived in a small university town near the Canadian border. He was a well-respected professor of criminology, author of two books and seminar presenter on his specialty -- stalking. They'd flown to the town in the Pacific Northwest where Trevor March lived but couldn't find March. Then, with a lucky break, they learned from a neighbor that he'd left town on a Greyhound bus. The neighbor had just returned by Greyhound from visiting her mother in Seattle and had seen March board a bus at the greyhound station. The neighbor hadn't noticed where the bus was headed but Zach and Devon quickly got that information from the man at the ticket window. Their forged military credentials came in handy.

They'd notified Art of their discovery and had flown back to DC for further orders. The ticket seller had revealed that the man in question had purchased a ticket to Rivermont and also a ticket from Rivermont to Washington DC. Art told them they would be accompanying him to Rivermont. He assumed that March was on his way to see Julia Dennison in Rivermont, and Art planned to intercept Trevor there.

Neither Zach nor Devon had asked Art what would happen in Rivermont. They'd worked for Crowley for almost two years now and during that time had been involved in several nefarious schemes for their employer, with at least one death resulting from their activities. They could only assume that Mr. Crowley would want a permanent solution to his March problem.

Once the three passengers were aboard the Gulfstream and buckled in, the plane took off. Crowley spent the flight on his cell phone, calling the advisers, fundraisers and lobbyists who were part of his nascent political campaign. He took a call from his fiancée, explaining that some unexpected business had come up, making it necessary for him to be out of town for several days. He told her he'd be in touch when he knew he was heading back home.

At one point in the flight, he called Zach and Devon into his private office at the back of the plane and had them go over their findings about Trevor March in detail. They repeated what they'd already told him, not able to add any additional details to their story.

Art tapped his fingers on his desk, thinking. Then he said, "Good job in determining that March is headed to Rivermont. So obviously that's our destination also. It's imperative that we locate March as soon as possible and neutralize him. He has information that could derail my presidential run, and I don't intend to let that happen."

Art dismissed the men, and when they'd left his suite, he leaned back in the leather desk chair and began to think. Art had always assumed that Trevor March was the father of Julia Dennison's daughter Lee, although he had no proof. Over the years, Art had kept an eye on Julia to make sure that March never tried to contact her.

Now it was all falling apart. Art had never been able to locate Trevor once he alighted from the freighter in Seattle. He'd disappeared, and no matter what Art did, he couldn't find Trevor. But now, Art would find him and neutralize him. That was the only way to salvage his political ambitions.

**Chapter 22**  
**Lee Carruthers**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

First thing Thursday morning, Lee sent a quick text to her mom, asking if she could come by in the evening to talk to her. Julia replied with "Yes, of course. Talk about what?" Lee answered, "Just things. See you around 8 after I get the kids in bed." Julia sent a quick "Okey-dokey!"

Lee spent Thursday doing her normal wife, mom and writer activities, trying to keep her mind off worrisome things, at least until the evening. After dropping Penny and Paul at their nearby elementary school, she stopped at the post office to pick up mail from the postal box she maintained there for her writing materials. As she expected, she found a thick manila envelope waiting for her, galley proofs from her latest book. She welcomed their arrival, glad to have the editing work to keep her mind off her continuing writer's block and what was going on in her personal life.

She brewed a pot of coffee and took it to her office, along with the galley proofs. She left her cell phone on its charger on the kitchen counter. She didn't want any interruptions.

She sat down at her desk, spread the galley proofs out and set to work. At first, she worried that her writer's block would interfere with her editing but that didn't seem to be the case. Soon she was lost in her thriller, smoothing out sentences, clearing up confusing plot actions, expanding her characters. Sometimes she thought she enjoyed the editing process almost as much as she enjoyed the creative process. As she deleted and added and refined, she felt she was in her element. She hoped that this wasn't the last thriller she was to write. She hoped that somehow she could get past her writer's block and once again start writing.

Several hours later, she stood up, stretched and headed to the kitchen for lunch. She put a frozen pizza in the oven then picked up her cell phone and saw she had three missed calls, one from Casey, one from Jack and one from her mother but none of them had left voice mails. However, each of them had also sent her a text, asking her to call when she had a chance.

She answered each text with the same message: "Buried in editing galley proofs. Talk to you later." When the oven timer signaled that the pizza was done, she took it out of the oven, cut it into slices and slipped the slices onto a plate. On a whim, she headed out to the patio. The weather outside was beautiful, sunny and in the low 80's, perfect for eating al fresco.

Lunch over, she took her plate back into the kitchen and put it into the dishwasher. Once again, she glanced at her cell phone, noting that Casey, Jack and her mom had all responded to her texts, saying the equivalent of "Talk to you soon."

Back in her office, she dug into the galley proofs. She was making amazing progress. Evidently her writer's block didn't extend to editing, thank heavens.

At 3 o'clock, she once again stood up and stretched. It was time to pick Penny and Paul up from school.

Half an hour later, Lee pulled her SUV into the garage and helped Penny and Paul carry in their backpacks and lunch bags. The backpacks were heavy with textbooks, and Lee hoped that the kids didn't try to lug them around school all day.

In the kitchen, Lee fixed after school snacks for Penny and Paul and joined them at the high stools at the kitchen counter. With a lot of prodding and leading questions from Lee, her daughter and son shared the day's activities at school with her.

Snacks finished, Penny and Paul started upstairs with their backpacks to do homework. Lee called after them, "Hey, guys, don't forget that it's spaghetti night, and Pawpaw is coming for dinner."

She grinned when she heard both of them call out, "Yay!" Her phone dinged and she pulled it and saw Casey had texted he was on his way home. She called him right back and said "Hi there, handsome," when he answered.

"What's up?" Casey asked.

"I just wanted to remind you your dad is coming for dinner tonight. It's spaghetti night," Lee said.

"Yep," Casey answered. "I remembered. In fact, I talked to Dad today, and he's planning on staying for awhile after dinner to watch the Cardinals game with me."

After Lee and Casey ended their call, Lee cleaned up the remains of Penny and Paul's snack. She then got out the ingredients for spaghetti, along with the makings for cheese garlic bread and Caesar salad.

She turned on the small television on one corner of the kitchen counter, tuning the TV to the news. For a long while, during the nation's struggle with chaos in Washington, Lee had been unable to watch the news. Now with the chaos gone and things back to normal, if there was such a thing in the national government, Lee could once again watch the news. Fortunately, it was a light news day, and the broadcast led off with a feel-good story about a young boy rescuing his sister from drowning in their pond.

How different the news was six months ago, Lee thought. Then the government was on the verge of a shutdown. Only the unexpected resignation of the president averted disaster. Lee nodded her head in appreciation of the new normal and went back to preparing dinner.

Once the spaghetti was in the oven, Lee quickly prepared the cheese garlic bread and put together the salad. She set the table in the dining room, using the good china and silverware, along with linen napkins and her best place mats. Usually the family ate dinner at the kitchen table, with the everyday dishes and silverware. But every once in awhile, Lee wanted to expose Penny and Paul to the pleasures of fine dining. She smiled to herself as she thought about that. Penny and Paul wouldn't notice the china or silverware. They'd be too engrossed in listening to their grandfather tell stories about when he was police chief. Both of her children worshipped Jack, thinking he was the best grandfather in the world and for sure, the most exciting, interesting one.

Promptly at 6 p.m. Lee heard the doorbell ring and knew it was her always-on-time father-in-law. She headed to the front of the house and met Casey in the entrance hall. He grabbed her hand, and they answered the front door together.

Jack stood on the porch, grinning at his son and daughter-in-law. In one arm he held a bouquet of summer flowers. In the other arm he held a bulging clear plastic bag from a nearby video game store.

Casey held the door open for his dad, then he and Lee stepped aside to let Jack in.

Jack handed the bouquet to Lee, saying, "Beautiful flowers for my beautiful hostess."

Lee took the bouquet and buried her face in the flowers. "They smell delightful."

Casey took the plastic bag from Jack and asked, "Dad, what is this? You didn't buy more video games for Penny and Paul, did you?"

Jack gave his son a sheepish look as he answered. "I may have."

Casey shook his head but dropped the subject. He started to head to the family room but Jack stopped him, saying, "Could we go into your den, son, before the kids come downstairs? I'd like to get us all on the same page about this Art Crowley / Trevor March thing. I've checked with Julia, and she's all in favor of me sharing everything we know with both of you."

Lee hesitated a moment, then asked, "Everything?"

"Yes, Lee. Everything."

Lee nodded and said, "Lead the way."

The three of them walked down the hall to the room that Casey used as combination den and home office. Inside the room, Jack closed the door and they sat around the library table in the middle of the room. Casey put the plastic bag filled with video games on the floor by his chair and turned to his dad.

"So? What's up, Dad?"

"First things first." He turned to look at Lee and said, "Lee, your mother has given me her permission to tell you some things that you don't know about."

Lee felt her heart begin to pound. She had a good idea about what Jack was going to tell her. Somehow, she was glad that it was Jack who was telling her and not her mother. Somehow, it was easier this way, she thought.

Jack reached out and took Lee's hand in his. "Your mother loves you very much, Lee. You know that. She tried to create a safe and secure life for you growing up. One of the things she did was invent a hero father for you. She wanted you to have a heritage you could be proud of. When she was a young woman, she got involved with a man she thought was above reproach. But it turned out that he wasn't. He supposedly died in the midst of a tragic situation. Your mother wanted you to never find out about that. But unfortunately that's no longer possible." Jack paused for a moment, looking into Lee's eyes, which were brimming with unshed tears. Then he continued.

"Lee, your father is Trevor March. Or Josh Walters as you know him. All these years, your mother thought he died. When she saw that picture on your phone, she knew he was alive. She came to see me and told me everything."

Jack paused a moment, then continued. "An hour or two later, you came to see me wanting to do the same investigation. Because of client confidentiality, I couldn't tell either one of you that I was also working for the other. I did some investigating and found a lot of information on Josh Walters. But then as I did more digging, I felt I had to tell your mom that you were trying to find out who Josh Walters is. And that's when she told me the whole story about Trevor March being your father and about her hatred for Art Crowley."

Casey had been silent so far. Now, he reached out and took Lee's other hand. "Lee, are you okay? I know this must be a lot to take in."



Lee pulled her hands away from both men and sat back in her chair. "Casey, did you know about this?"

Casey shook his head and said, "Just some of it. Dad didn't tell me about Trevor March being your father." Casey looked at his dad and then back at Lee. "I guess he wanted you to know first -- or at the same time."

Lee sat there, running things through her mind. Then she turned to Jack and asked, "Did you find Trevor March?"

Jack said, "No, actually I didn't. I tracked him down to a small town in the state of Washington near the Canadian border. But he wasn't there. The university where he teaches said he'd unexpectedly taken a leave of absence. So I reached a dead end. When I reported this back to your mother, she said it was time to tell you the truth. As she thought about it, she asked me if I could tell you about Trevor March."

Lee shook her head. "So she couldn't face me? She couldn't tell me herself?" Lee set her jaw as she waited for Jack's answer.

"No, Lee. It wasn't like that at all. She felt it would be easier for you to hear it from me. She knew you were going to be upset, and she wanted to give you time to calm down. She didn't want to place you in the position of blowing up at her and then regretting it later."

Lee sat there, silent, slowly shaking her head. Casey and Jack exchanged looks, then Jack stood, patted Lee on the shoulder and left the den. As he closed the door, he said, "I'll go see the kids."

Casey stood and walked around the table to where Lee was sitting. He put his arm around her and gave her a squeeze. For a few moments, Lee sat motionless. Then, she stood and put her arms around Casey.

"Are you okay?" he murmured into her hair.

"Ummm," Lee murmured back. "I'm okay as long as you're right here."

"Always," Casey said.

Finally, Lee stood back and looked up at her husband.

"Time to get dinner on the table," she said.

"Are you sure? I can take the kids to McDonald's if you need some time," Casey said.

"No, it's all right. Keeping busy will be good for me," Lee said, then added, "I arranged to go see Mom after dinner. I was going to ask her about the photo of her and the Josh Walters lookalike in front of the Lincoln Memorial. But now I guess I have my answer." She paused, then continued, "I'm still going over to see her. I need to talk to her more than ever now."

Once again, Casey asked, "Are you sure?"

"Yes, it's something I have to do," Lee said.

An hour and a half later, dinner was finished. Casey put the dishes in the dishwasher while Lee tucked Penny and Paul into bed. Jack had gone into the family room to watch the pre-game show. He and Lee had been quiet at dinner, letting Casey and the kids carry the conversation around the table.

Before leaving the house, Lee went into the master bathroom and splashed cold water on her face. Then, looking in the mirror, she shook her head and began to apply make-up. She smoothed on powder, lipstick, eyeliner and mascara. She brushed her hair and put on gold dangly earrings. Then she laughed at herself and strode out of the bathroom and downstairs.

She poked her head in the family room and said a brisk good-night. Then, thinking better of it, she walked over to the couch where Casey and Jack were sitting. She stood in front of Jack and said, "Thank you, Jack. I know you and Mom intended this for the best. It's all right."

Jack stood and hugged his daughter-in-law. "You're the best, kid," Jack said.

"Maybe sometimes," Lee said with a grin. "Okay, I'm off to talk to Mom. Wish me luck."

"I'll walk you out," Casey said, standing and taking Lee's hand. They headed to the front door and Casey gave Lee a kiss and then watched his wife as she walked across the front lawn to the side door on Julia's garage.

**Chapter 23**  
**Lee Carruthers**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

Lee paused at the garage door, taking a deep breath to calm herself. Then she reached for the knob and slowly turned it and walked into the garage. She walked across the garage, past her mother's Jeep. At the door leading into the laundry room, she paused once again. She wanted to handle the conversation with her mother well. She didn't want to lose her temper or argue with Julia.

Inside the laundry room, Lee called out, "Mom, I'm here." She walked into the kitchen and found her mother standing by the sink, putting dishes into the dishwasher.

Julia turned and walked over to Lee to hug her. "Hi, sweetheart. It's good to see you." She stepped back and looked into Lee's eyes. "How are you?" she asked.

"Okay, I guess. We need to talk, Mom," Lee said.

"Yes, yes, we do," Julia agreed. "Let's go into my office." She led the way down the hall. Inside the office, Julia closed the door behind them and sat in one of the chairs. Lee sat on the couch opposite her mother.

"Jack called me," Julia said. "He told me he'd talked to you and told you about Trevor March."

"Yes," Lee said, then sighed. "Mom. I wish you had been the one to tell me."

"I know," Julia said. "But I thought it would be easier for you to hear it from Jack."

For a few moments, Lee said nothing, thinking about her mother's words.

"I can see why you might think that," Lee finally said. "And maybe, just maybe, you're right."

Julia didn't say anything, just letting Lee's words hang in the air.

Finally, Lee broke the silence with, "Tell me about Trevor March."

Julia looked down at her hands folded in her lap, then looked over at Lee. "Trevor was a delight. He was intelligent, thoughtful and had a great sense of humor. And he was a handsome fellow," Julia said with a smile.

"How did you meet?" Lee asked.

"I was an intern and then a copywriter at an ad agency in DC. Trevor and Art Crowley were partners in a DC lobbying firm, and they were clients of the agency. Matt Witticomb, the managing partner of Witticomb and Merrill Advertising was a fraternity brother of Trev and Art. Things are very much a "good old boys" network in DC."

"Did you work on Trevor and Art's account?" Lee asked.

"Yes, I did. So did my friend Elena, whom you're going to meet soon. She's upstairs right now but she'll be coming down later. We were both copywriters assigned to the lobbying firm's account. They didn't really need two copywriters but Art decided he wanted two cute young things, as he called us, on the account. He was quite the lech."

"Oh?" Lee questioned.

"Yes, indeed," Julia answered. She thought for a moment, then continued. "In fact, that's what caused me to the end the relationship with Trevor."

"Oh?" Lee said again.

"Before I got involved with Trevor, Art tried to start something with me. I ignored him. I wasn't interested in him in any way. But he kept it up. He wouldn't take no for an answer. It was as if he thought he was irresistible, as if it was his right to have any woman he wanted. Whenever we were alone, he would make suggestive comments, he'd try to kiss me. Once grabbed me in the stairwell, and I almost fell down the stairs trying to get away from him. Finally, one night, he trapped me in a conference room and tried to force himself on me."

Oh, Mom! What happened?" Lee said.

"I managed to get away from him, and I went straight to Matt -- Matt Witticomb, the head of the agency. Matt was concerned about what I told him and promised to talk to Art."

"That reminds me of all the sexual assaults that are coming out nowadays," Lee said. "Hopefully things will get better with the #MeToo and #TimesUp initiatives."

"Hopefully," Julia agreed. "Unfortunately, things were different back then. I think this kind of thing happened a lot but women were afraid to speak up about it. They didn't want to lose their jobs."

"So what did this have to do with your break-up with Trevor?" Lee asked.

"Well, shortly after the final episode with Art, I started going out with Trevor. I knew they were good friends along with being business partners so I never told Trev what Art had done and what he had tried to do. Trev and I fell in love, and it was great. I was happier than I'd ever been in my life. I thought he was the best man in the world. But I could see that Art was still up to his old tricks, hitting on the secretaries and assistants. I found out later that he and Elena had a full-blown affair off and on for years but I didn't know it at the time."

"How could she?" Lee said.

"I don't know but she did. She claims she saw something in Art that other people didn't see but..." Julia let her voice trail off.

"Anyway, as Trevor and I got serious about our relationship, I asked him to leave Art's firm and drop him as a friend. I couldn't give Trev a reason, just that I didn't approve of Art, and I didn't want him in Trevor's life," Julia said.

"What did Trevor do?" Lee asked.

"He kept questioning me, trying to figure out why I felt so strongly about removing Art from his life. Finally, it came down to me giving Trev an ultimatum. It was either Art or me. And for whatever reason, Trevor couldn't or wouldn't give up Art. So I left. I quit my job and came back home to Rivermont. Evidently, Matt must have been afraid I was going to sue or something because he gave me an overly generous bonus and an equally overly generous severance package." Julia sighed, then continued. "I didn't know at the time that I was pregnant with you. And by the time I realized I was pregnant, that whole scandal with the model happened, and Trevor was dead, supposedly."

"Why did you think you couldn't tell everyone the truth?" Lee asked. "Why did you make up the stories you did?"

Julia sighed and said, "At the time, it seemed the right thing to do. Trevor's death was surrounded by scandal. He took responsibility for that model's death. It was all just a huge mess."

"Do you think Trevor really killed the model?" Lee asked.

"I don't know. My friend Elena is convinced that Art Crowley was behind Natalia's death. She thinks Art somehow conned Trevor into taking the fall for her death. I guess I'd rather believe that than believe Trevor is a murderer."

"I'd rather believe that, too," Lee said. "You know, I really liked Josh Walters when I met him. He was an interesting, intelligent man. And he liked my books," she ended with a grin.

"Well, who wouldn't like your books. You're an excellent writer, and you deserve all the success you've had. By the way, how is it coming with that writer's block of yours?" Julia asked.

"Oh, you know. It's still there. But I spent a really productive day editing galleys so maybe there's hope for me somehow." Lee said. "But let's get back to the topic at hand. Did Grandma ever know the truth?"

"No, she never knew and still doesn't -- although nowadays she doesn't know much of anything. She believed the story I told everyone. That I married someone in the service who died overseas." Julia paused, then came to sit next to her daughter on the couch. She put her arm around Lee and pulled her in close.

"I told all those lies for you. I couldn't bear for you to have a murderer for a father. That wasn't the legacy I wanted for you. I wanted you to have a father you could be proud of, one that would inspire you, not bring you down. That's why I made him into a hero, giving his life for his country, dying a hero's death."

"Oh, Mom," Lee said. "I'm so sorry you've had to go through all of this. And to do it alone."

"Well, I had your grandmother right by my side for most of those years," Julia said.

"And now she's gone," Lee said, sadness in her voice.

"Well, Grandma is still here, sort of," Julia said. "Although it seems as though there's less of her there each time I go to see her."

"I need to go see her and take Penny and Paul with me," Lee said.

"Honey, I'm pretty sure she won't know who Penny and Paul are. I'm not sure she'll even know you," Julia said, the sadness in her voice matching Lee's.

"Alzheimer's is the cruelest disease. It affects not only the person afflicted but also all the people who love them," Lee said.

Just then, they heard a light tap on the door. Julia stood up and went over to open the door. Elena stood there in the hallway. "Come in, E," Julia said. "I want you to meet my daughter Lee."

Elena came into the room as Lee rose from the couch. Lee extended her hand to shake hands with her mother's friend but found herself enveloped in an enthusiastic hug.

"Lee, it's wonderful to finally meet you. I've so much about you from your mother," Elena said as she stepped back from the hug.

"And it's good to meet you." Lee said.

Julia put an arm around Lee and said, "Well, ladies, let's go into the kitchen. Elena and I haven't had dinner yet, and I for one am starving."

"Copy that!" Elena chimed in.

"That doesn't sound like aviation speak," Lee teased.

"No, it's not. I watch too many police procedurals in my down time," Elena said with a grin.

The three women left Julia's home office and went into the kitchen. Lee and Elena sat on high stools at the counter while Julia began pulling things out of the fridge and the freezer. Within a few minutes, she had a pan of frozen homemade lasagna heating up in the microwave and garlic bread in the oven.

She tossed a salad and began setting places at the dining room table. "Lee?" she said. "Will you join us?"

At first Lee shook her head, then changed her mind and say, "Actually, yes. I didn't eat much at dinner, and I could eat something." She grinned at her mother as she added, "Especially since it's your lasagna."

For the next few minutes, Lee and Elena helped Julia get everything onto the table. When they were finally seated around the table, Julia bowed her head and said grace. When Julia was finished, Elena reached out and squeezed Julia's hand and said, "Thank you for that. It brings back memories of my childhood. Unfortunately, grace has fallen by the wayside for many people."

"Not when my Mom is around," Lee said. "She taught Penny and Paul to say grace, and they take turns doing it at dinner. It's very sweet."

"I agree," Elena said. As she took a bite of the lasagna, she looked at Julia and said, "This is delicious. When did you become such a good cook?"

"I've had a lot of practice," Julia said. "Lee and I lived with my mother for most of Lee's childhood, and I was the designated cook. For all of her wonderful qualities, my mother never quite got the hang of cooking."

"That's being generous, Mom," Lee said. "As far as I can remember, Grandma has never produced anything edible in the kitchen."

Julia and Elena laughed, and then Julia asked Elena, "Do you cook?"

Elena shook her head and said, "No, absolutely not. But I married a man who is an excellent cook. He's a super pilot, a handsome fellow and he cooks -- the perfect trifecta."

Once again there was laughter around the table. As they ate, Lee was grateful that there was no mention of the elephant or elephants in the room: Art Crowley and Trevor March. She appreciated the opportunity to eat the meal in peace and save any serious discussions for after dinner.

The three women cleared the table, and while Julia put the dishes in the dishwasher, Lee put on a pot of coffee. Julia got out some brownies and put them on a plate and put the plate on tray. Lee put the coffee on the tray along with cups, sugar, creamer and napkins.

The three women settled themselves in the family room with coffee and brownies. For a few minutes, the room was silent. Then Julia broke the silence with, "Time to talk about the elephants in the room."

Lee and Elena chuckled, knowing exactly what Julia was talking about. Lee turned to Elena and said, "My father-in-law filled me in on certain things. And then Mom and I had a long talk to follow up. So I think it's safe to say we're all up-to-date and on the same page. The question is where do we go from here."

Julia turned to Elena and said, "Do you have any ideas?"

Elena nodded and said, "I think we need to do at least two things. The first is locating Trevor March. What's the name he's using now?"

Speaking at the same time, Lee and Julia both said, "Josh Walters."

Elena laughed and said, "You two make a good team."

"Yes, we do," Julia said.

"Anyway, we need to locate Trevor March. And then we need to confront Art Crowley," Elena said.

"You can count me out on confronting Art Crowley. I refuse to even be in the same room with that monster ever again," Julia said.

Elena considered her friend, then said, "What if in the same room we also had Lee's husband, the police detective, and Lee's father-in-law, the former police chief?"

Julia considered her friend's suggestion, then said, "That might work for me. But you know how I feel about Crowley. He tricked me into meeting with him earlier, and I think you were involved in that."

"Yes, and I apologize for that. I had no idea what he was up to. If I had known, I certainly wouldn't have been involved. Now, where do we stand with locating Trevor March?"

"Jack -- that's Jack Carruthers, Lee's father-in-law and the former police chief, found that Trevor is living in a university town in the state of Washington near the Canadian border," Julia said. "He's a professor at the university. But he's not there. The university says he's taken an unexpected leave of absence. So I guess the answer to your question is that we stand nowhere as far as locating Trevor."

Elena sighed and said, "It's absolutely critical that we locate Trevor and get him to help us stop Art from his political aspirations. Trevor is the only one with sufficient ammunition to stop him. Art wouldn't admit it to me, but I'm convinced he's the one responsible for the model's death and Trevor taking responsibility and faking his death."

"But without Trevor March, we can't prove that," Lee said.

"That's why we have to find him," Elena said.

Julia turned to Lee and asked, "Do you think we should call Jack and Casey and ask them to join us?"

"Well, let's just go over to my house to meet with them. I wouldn't want to leave Penny and Paul alone in the house, even though they're fast asleep," Lee said.

"You're right, honey," Julia said. "That's a better idea. Why don't you go on home and explain to Casey and Jack that we're coming to talk with them? I'll wrap up some brownies for the men, and Elena and I will be right there."

"Sounds good, Mom," Lee said. "See you in a few." Lee walked out of the family room, and in a moment, Julia and Elena heard the door leading from the laundry room into the garage closing behind her.

Julia went into the kitchen and put the rest of the brownies on a plate, wrapped it in foil. Elena came into the kitchen and the two women walked next door to Lee's house. They walked across Lee's front lawn and up to the front door. Julia opened the door, and they walked inside.



**Chapter 24**  
**Casey and Jack Carruthers**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

The Cardinals game had just ended when Lee returned home. She gave Casey a peck on the cheek and took the remote out of his hand. She clicked off the TV and sat on the couch between Casey and Jack.

"Mom and her friend Elena are on their way over, with brownies, by the way. We all need to talk about this Trevor March / Art Crowley thing," Lee said.

Jack spoke up. "Sounds like a good idea to me. I wish my guy had been able to locate Trevor March but no such luck. Trevor March is definitely off the grid. We've been tracking his credit cards but no hits so far. I think he's deliberately not using his credit cards so that no one can find him.

Just then, Julia and Elena walked into Lee's family room. Lee introduced Elena to Casey and Jack, and the four of them all sat down. Julia set the plate of brownies on the coffee table but everyone ignored them.

For the next hour, the four of them discussed every detail of the situation, and toward the end of the discussion, Jack and Casey finished off the brownies. Finally, with no resolution in sight, Julia said she and Elena were going home and would be in touch on Friday to see if anyone had come up with any ideas about what to do next.

Jack stood and said he'd walk them home. Julia laughed and told him that wasn't necessary. Jack said, "It'll give me a chance to stretch my legs before I head home." Everyone said their good-nights, and Jack accompanied Julia and Elena back to Julia's house. As they walked across the lawn, Jack noticed an SUV crawling past. The SUV didn't have its headlights on even though it was full dark outside. Jack yelled out, "Hey, turn on your headlights." But the SUV just sped up and disappeared around a curve.

"Fool!" Jack called out to the vehicle.

**Chapter 25**  
**Trevor March**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

When he arrived in Rivermont, Trevor had a heck of a time renting the SUV. Alighting from the Greyhound bus at the bus station, he'd gone next door to the car rental agency. They'd insisted on seeing a credit card. Not wanting to risk someone tracking him by credit card use, he'd refused. He'd invented a bias against credit cards and explained that he always used cash because he was fervently against the concept of going into debt.

The young woman manning the rental desk had tried over and over again to explain company policy to him, telling him she couldn't rent a vehicle to him without first registering his credit card number on the rental application.

They were at loggerheads until Trevor asked to speak with the agency manager. The young woman had made a phone call and minutes later, another woman, this one a few years older, came out of a back office and approached the front counter.

The young woman explained the predicament, and the manager listened carefully, taking it all in. She looked like she was in her late thirties, Trevor thought, and he also thought she was quite attractive.

Finally, with a dismissive nod of her head to her younger employee, the manager turned to Trevor with a smile, and said, "Sir, surely you understand the company's policy. I can't let you drive off with tens of thousands of dollars worth of company property without some guarantee that you'll return the property and pay for its use."

Trevor thought for a moment, then said, "What if I pay a deposit, say a thousand dollars, toward the usage charge of the vehicle?"

The manager thought for a moment, then asked, "How long would you want the use of the vehicle?"

"I'm just in town for a couple of days. I'm from the New York City and will be returning there soon. I would just be using the vehicle in Rivermont, and I would be returning it to this agency office in a couple of days."

The manager considered his answer, then asked for his driver's license and any other form of identification. Trevor had come on this trip prepared to produce identification of a prior identity of his. He took out a driver's license and Social Security card in the name of David Halsted, the name he'd first used after he'd faked his death.

Trevor held his breath as the manager examined the license and card, then turned to the copy machine behind the counter and made copies of them.

The manager returned Trevor's documents, then removed a set of keys from a rack behind the desk. She gave Trevor some papers to sign and asked him about supplementary insurance, which Trevor declined. Trevor pulled out his wallet and counted out \$1,000 in fifty dollar bills. The woman recounted the money and put it in a cash drawer. Then she asked Trevor to follow her out to the parking lot.

Trevor followed behind the woman, anxious to move on to the next leg of his journey. He'd managed to sleep part of the bus ride halfway across the country but he still felt logy and half awake. As soon as he got his vehicle, his next stop would be some place where he could get a giant size container of coffee.

As Trevor and the rental car manager walked across the parking lot, Trevor asked her where the nearest place for coffee was. She pointed across the street to a well-lit diner and said, "Tom's has the best coffee in town. At least in my opinion."

The manager stopped in front of a white Jeep Grand Cherokee. She handed the keys to Trevor and asked if he had any questions. Trevor said, "No, I actually have a similar vehicle back home. I was going to ask for help with the GPS but I think I've got it." The manager said, "Well, good luck then. We'll see you in a couple of days." She turned and headed back to the rental office.

Trevor unlocked the Jeep and put his briefcase on the front passenger seat and his duffel bag on the back seat. He climbed in and put the key in the ignition. Then he reached for his briefcase and pulled out a sheath of papers on top of his laptop. He entered an address into the GPS system, Julia Dennison's address. He looked at the route on the GPS screen and thought that it thankfully looked fairly straightforward. He started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot. He paused in the left lane, waiting for an oncoming car to pass him by. Then he made a turn into Tom's diner.

Half an hour later, he was back on the road. He ordered a BLT at the diner and an extra large coffee to go. He settled back in the driver's seat and listened as the robotic voice of the GPS directed him through his first few turns.

From what he could tell on the map, Julia's home was on the outskirts of Rivermont. It seemed to be near or next to the Mississippi River in a community called The Bluffs.

His head whirled with thoughts of seeing Julia again. He was torn between anticipation and fury. He was furious at her for hiding the fact for thirty years that they shared a daughter. But he'd never stopped loving her and wondered what it would be like to see her again after all this time.

The annoyingly robotic voice of the GPS directed him to the turnoff for The Bluffs. He was tempted to turn the darn thing off but didn't want to risk getting lost in an unfamiliar neighborhood in an unfamiliar town. The entrance to The Bluffs had a somewhat elegant guard house but it was dark and unoccupied, for which he was grateful. The main road into the enclave was curvy and hilly, and the subdivision had few streetlights. Evidently, strangers weren't encouraged or maybe even welcome.

Trevor crept along the road, trying to read house numbers, looking for Julia Dennison's house. Hearing a man shouting at him, Trevor accelerated the SUV and disappeared around a curve. He circled around the subdivision and found himself back in the vicinity of where the man had yelled at him. He finally found the house number he was looking for. The outside lights were on, and the house looked brightly lit inside.

Trevor drove down to a cul de sac and parked so that he had a view of Julia's house. He sat there, engine running, lights out, trying to decide what to do. He'd been ready to barge in on Julia but now he wasn't so sure.

**Chapter 26**  
**Art Crowley**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

Art's Gulfstream landed at the private airport on the north side of Rivermont just after sunset. His two bodyguards and jack of all trades, Zach the taller and Devon the younger, descended the airstair in front of Art.

A shiny black extended SUV was parked on the tarmac waiting for their arrival. Zach had arranged for the Suburban with a car service. The three men got into the vehicle; Zach took the front passenger seat, and Devon sat next to Art.

The driver had been given the address of their destination and had entered it into the GPS. Zach told the driver they were ready to go. The trip to The Bluffs subdivision was a silent one. Zach stared straight ahead, a grim look on his face. He had no idea what his employer was up to but he didn't like the vibe of this one. He and Devon had conferred in private on the flight from DC to Rivermont, and both of them were concerned about Crowley's game plan. Always looking ahead, they'd done what research they could with what little information they had. Crowley had given them the address of a woman named Julia Dennison as their ultimate destination.

All that Zach and Devon had been able to find out was that Dennison was a city employee with a small online footprint, not unusual for a woman in her sixties. Crowley hadn't shared anything about the woman with them, which was the man's normal modus operandi. He never told them anything but what he decided was absolutely necessary for them to know.

Zach and Devon were fed up with working for Crowley and knew they would do anything to get out from under his bondage. Their ultimate plan was to get something on the man that would counter the blackmail information he had on them.

In the rear seat, Devon watched Art out of the corner of his eye, trying not to let the man know he was under observation. He and Zach did their best to hide the animosity and disdain they had for their employer.

Art was tapping away on his phone, sending either emails or texts. If Devon turned his head just the right way, he could see the phone's screen reflected in the car window next to Art. The reflection showed a text message to the head of an organization that Devon recognized as one of the political action groups supporting Crowley's run for the presidency.

What Devon could read of the message said something to the effect that Crowley was on his way to deal with the final obstacle in his path. Devon snorted inwardly at Crowley's audacity. The man had no rational reason to believe he could win the presidential nomination, much less win the election itself. What a nincompoop he was.

Devon drew his own phone out of his jacket pocket and typed a quick message to Zach: "Idiot man thinks he's on his way to deal with the final obstacle in his path. Little does he know that if we wanted, you and I could represent the true obstacles."

A few moments later, Devon received an answering text from Zach, saying, "Right on, man!" From the front seat, Devon could hear the unpleasant voice of the GPS providing detailed instructions for the drive. Devon avoided GPS whenever he could, preferring good old-fashioned maps you could hold in your hands. When he was forced to go online for directions, he used Google Maps but never sent the directions to his phone.

As Devon unobtrusively stared at the reflection of Crowley's phone in the Suburban's window, he saw that the man was now typing a text to his fiancée. Devon had never been able to understand why a beautiful, relatively young woman like Felicity Moran would be attracted to Art Crowley. Granted, the man was in excellent shape for a man in his sixties. And there was the money, of course. Billions of dollars. Considering that, Devon decided that Felicity must be in it for the money.

Devon squinted a bit, having difficulty reading the text to Felicity. It was something about one last thing Crowley had to do before returning to DC. There was some sexy stuff that Devon managed to ignore, disgusted by Crowley's graphic description of what he intended to do with and to Felicity when he returned.

Finally, Crowley locked the screen of his phone and slipped it into his jacket pocket. He leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes. Devon knew the man would never make conversation with him. To Crowley, Devon was just an appendage, something there to do Crowley's bidding.

But if he and Zach had their way, if they could dig up the right dirt, they'd never again have to deal with their obnoxious employer. Then, Devon, too, leaned back in the seat, enjoying these few minutes of peace before all hell broke loose.

**Chapter 27**  
**Trevor March**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

Finally, Trevor managed to gather up enough courage and will to get out of the rental car and walk up to Julia's house. He couldn't decide if he loved her or hated her. At the moment, the hate was overpowering the love.

He stood on the front porch for a few moments, wondering how Julia would react to seeing him again after all these years. Would she even recognize him? He thought he'd aged well but he had aged. He wondered what Julia looked like now. She had been a beautiful young woman, dazzling even. Over the years, he'd seen photos of her in the Rivermont newspaper that he subscribed to, and she had remained a beautiful woman

He lifted his hand to the doorbell and pressed it. It seemed to take forever for anyone to come to the door.

## **Chapter 28**

### **Julia**

**Thursday**

**May 16**

Julia and Elena were sitting in the family room when Julia heard the doorbell. "Jack must have forgotten something," Julia said as she stood and headed toward the entryway.

She turned on the porch light and opened the door without looking through the peephole to see who was on her porch. A man was standing there, staring at her.

"Oh my God," Julia whispered, her heart pounding. It was Trevor.

For a moment, she couldn't move. She tried to speak but nothing came out. Finally, she opened the screen door wide and stepped aside to allow Trevor to enter.

Julia and Trevor stood in the entry hall, staring at one another, neither one speaking. From behind her, Julia heard Elena's footsteps on the hardwood floor.

"Who was at the door?" Elena called out.

Julia didn't answer. She just stood there, staring at Trevor.

Elena walked into the entry hall but stopped walking the moment she saw the man standing in front of Julia.

"Trevor? Trevor March? Is that you?" Elena said.

Trevor turned toward Elena and said, "Elena, I presume."

For a few moments, none of the three spoke. They just stood there, Julia and Elena staring at Trevor, and Trevor staring at Julia. Finally, Julia said, "Let's go into the family room." She turned and walked down the hall toward the family room. Elena walked behind her, followed by Trevor.

In the family room, Julia and Elena sat on one of the couches. Trevor took a seat in a club chair opposite the two women.

Trevor looked at Julia and said in a soft voice, "Jules, you look wonderful. Not a day older than when I last saw you 30 something years ago."

Julia shook her head and said, "Baloney. I'm 62 years old, and I look every moment of that. Sometimes even more."

Elena looked first at Julia, and then at Trevor. "All right, let's get started on this. Trevor, tell us what happened 30 years ago." Then unable to stop herself, she asked, "Did you kill Natalia?"

Trevor hesitated before answering. Then he shook his head and said, "No. I didn't kill Natalia. Art did. He claimed it was an accident, not intentional."

The words hung in the room for a moment, then Julia asked, "And Art helped you fake your death?"

"Yes," Trevor answered, and left it at that.

"But why would you do such a thing?" Elena asked.

Trevor looked down at his hands folded on his lap. "Julia had broken up with me and left DC to go back to Rivermont. Without her, I thought my life was over. I didn't want to live that life anymore. So I agreed. Art gave me a small fortune to get me started on a new life. He arranged for a couple of new identities for me. The idea was to start out as one person, then switch to the other identity. His theory was that would make it easier for me to stay hidden."

At that moment, the doorbell rang. Elena stood and told Julia, "I'll see who it is," and walked toward the entry hall.



**Chapter 29**  
**Art Crowley**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

The driver of the Suburban pulled to a stop in front of a brightly lit two-story home. In the rear seat, Art Crowley nodded to Devon and said, "Go up to the door and see if Julia Dennison is home. Give me a signal if she is and wait there by the door."

Devon climbed out of the vehicle and walked up the brick pathway leading to the front door of the house. He rang the doorbell and waited. When no one came to the door immediately, he rang the bell again.

This time he could hear footsteps inside the house. The door opened slowly and a tall blonde stood there with a questioning look on her face. "Yes? What can I do for you?"

Devon cleared his throat and said, "Julia Dennison?"

"No," had been the blonde's response.

Devon said, "Is Ms. Dennison home?"

"Who are you and what do you want with her?" the blonde demanded.

"My employer is here to see Ms. Dennison. Is she home or not?" Devon said.

"And who is your employer?" the blonde asked.

"That's for Ms. Dennison to know. Is she here?" Devon could feel himself getting angry at this woman, whoever she might be.

"Ms Dennison is not currently available," the blonde announced and shut the door in his face. Devon stood there, speechless. He hesitated, trying to decide what to do. Finally, he rang the doorbell again but no one came to the door. That infuriated him, and he lifted a hand to the doorknocker and slammed it against the door.

Still no one came to the door. Devon walked back to the Suburban, opened the passenger door and stuck his head in and said, "They won't open the door."

For a moment, Art was silent. Then he said, "Zach, come on." Art climbed out of the rear seat of the Suburban, and Zach got out of the front passenger side. The three men walked up to the front porch of Julia Dennison's house.

**Chapter 30**  
**Julia Dennison**  
**Thursday**  
**May 16**

"Who was at the door?" Julia asked Elena when she returned to the family room.

"Some man who was asking for you. I sent him away. I figured we had more important things to take care of here," Elena said.

Julia considered protesting Elena's actions but let it go. Then they heard the knocker slamming at the front door and then pounding on the door. Trevor rose but Elena stopped him. "No, Trevor, don't. I'm afraid that's one of Art's men. Believe me, you don't want to mess with him."

Julia pulled her cell phone out of her pocket and said, "I'm calling Casey."

Elena said, "Are you sure you want to get the police involved?"

"For this, he's my son-in-law, not the police," Julia said as she called Casey. She quickly explained the situation to Casey, and he said he'd be right over.

The next thing they heard was the splintering of the front door. The three of them rushed into the entry hall and found Art Crowley standing behind two tall, muscular men, Around them lay the remains of the front door.

Trevor stepped forward and said to Art, "Art, what do you think you're doing?"

"Trevor, what a surprise to see you -- alive and all," Art said in a silky tone.

"It's no surprise to you that I'm alive. You're the one who arranged that whole faking my death thing." Trevor said.

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about. Natalia's death at your hands and your supposed suicide were a great shock to me," Art said.

"Cut the crap," Elena said. "And take your goons and get out of here. The police are on their way."

"Nonsense!" Art said. "No one would call the police on me."

Trevor headed toward the open doorway, saying, "Let's take this outside." He walked through the open doorway and down onto the lawn. He saw a man heading toward him from the house next door.

Art stepped through the doorway to go after Trevor, followed by Devon and Zach. Trevor headed across the lawn toward a long, lighted walkway. Art and his men followed.

Trevor looked back and saw that the man who'd been heading toward Julia's house had disappeared. He assumed that it had been Julia's son-in-law Casey and that he'd gone inside Julia's house.

When he reached the lighted walkway, Trevor looked over it and saw that the river lay below, the Mississippi, he assumed. The walkway was located on a high cliff above the river. He saw a long barge off in the distance slowly making its way down river, and for a moment, he wished for nothing more than to be on that barge, away from all that was happening here.

Art told Zach and Devon to stay where they were while he approached Trevor on the walkway.

Instead of adhering to Crowley's directions, the two men took off sprinting across the wide expanse of lawn, heading to the street. They got into a black Suburban and took off, the engine roaring.

When he was about 10 feet away from where Trevor stood, Art said, "Trevor, you've broken your word to me. You swore you'd never return, and you'd never tell anyone what happened."

Trevor glared at Art and said, "That was before I learned that Julia had my baby. You robbed me of my child."

Art waved his hand in a dismissive gesture and said in an offhand tone, "That's the way things go sometimes."

At those disdainful words, Trevor lunged toward Art, yelling, "How dare you say that! You destroyed my life, and I want you to pay for that!"

Art stumbled, caught off balance by Trevor. He grabbed the walkway railing and tried to regain his balance. But he was unable to right himself and started to topple over the railing. Trevor reached out and grabbed Art's arm, and Art grabbed Trevor's arm in turn. But rather than Trevor pulling Art back to safety, Art pulled Trevor over the railing with him. The two men tumbled over the cliff, down into the river.

As Art and Trevor fell over the cliff, Zach and Devon came running to the walkway. They stood peering over the railing, down into the river.

**Epilogue**  
**Julia's House**  
**Sunday Evening**  
**May 19**

Julia brought two trays of pizza and a large basket of cheese garlic bread into the great room. Seated around the room were Lee, Casey, Elena, Jack, Penny and Paul. Julia's cat Bouncer lay on the hearth, as if waiting for a fire even though it was May and 75 degrees outside.

Julia put the trays of pizza on the oversized coffee table, on which she'd already set several trivets to protect the table's finish from the hot pizza. Paper plates and napkins were on the other side of the table from the pizza.

Lee helped Penny and Paul fill their plates with pizza and bread and took them into den to watch a rerun of Sesame Street on the local PBS outlet.

The adults slowly helped themselves to the food and settled back in their seats. The room was quiet. Everyone was still in shock from what had happened three days ago.

The Rivermont police divers had retrieved Trevor March's and Art Crowley's bodies the morning after their nighttime fall. The maritime squad had begun searching the river as soon as Casey notified them what happened.

Julia and Lee were sitting close to each other on one of the couches. Julia leaned over to her daughter and said in a soft voice, "I'm so sorry you didn't get a chance to know Trevor."

Lee nodded and patted her mother's hand. "I know you are. Please, don't beat yourself up about all of this."

"How can I do anything else?" Julia said. "I made such a mess of everything."

"Mom, you did the best you could under the circumstances. I understand why you did what you did. Please, please forgive yourself." Julia squeezed her daughter's hand and nodded, saying, "I'll try."

Casey stood and came over to where his wife and mother-in-law were. He sat on the arm of the couch nearest to where Lee was sitting. "I have some news," he said.

Casey's words got everyone's attention. They turned toward him, ignoring their food. He said, "Right before I got here, I got a call from a sheriff's office in the northern part of the state. They apprehended Crowley's two bodyguards." He grinned at Lee and said, "They were still driving the Burb, not realizing it was equipped with a tracking device that made it easy-peasy to locate."

"About those two bodyguards Crowley had," Casey said. "We ran background checks on them and found some sketchy activities in both their pasts, despite the fact that they were former military."

"Really!" Jack said in clear surprise.

Elena spoke up for the first time. "That doesn't surprise me. Art had a preference for shady characters as his bodyguards." She paused, then continued. "I have some things to add to the story. From what Art told me, when he put his scheme for Trevor into place, he arranged for a new identity for Trev. The name was David Halsted. A few days ago, when Art told me about his scheme, he said even though he told Trevor to disappear, Art had planned to keep an eye on him. But Trevor must have seen though that. When Trevor got to Seattle, he

arranged for a new identity, Josh Walters. So Art lost Trevor. All these years, he's been searching for him with no luck."

Elena turned to Julia and said, "When I told him about the photo of Josh Walters, that was the first time he had any clues about Trevor's identity and whereabouts."

She paused a moment, then said, "And so Art decided to get rid of Trevor once and for all. Fortunately, his goons were unable to locate Trevor."

The room was quiet, the listeners absorbing Elena's words.

"What I don't understand," Jack said, "is why Crowley thought he had a chance in hell of winning the presidential nomination, much less the presidency itself. After what our country has been through the past few years, anyone could see that Crowley was of the same ilk as our previous monster of a commander in chief."

"Why don't you tell us what you really think, Dad?" Casey teased.

"Your father's right, Casey," Elena said. "I'm afraid Art was far from being in his right mind. He grew up thinking he owned the world and that conviction stayed with him his whole life. He thought and usually was proved right, that money could buy anything. He was prepared to spend his entire fortune on buying the presidency for himself. Thank heavens we were spared that catastrophe."

Around the room murmurs of agreement echoed in the air.

An hour later, Casey, Lee, Penny and Paul said their good-byes and headed home. Before walking out, Lee hugged Julia and whispered in her mother's ear. "I love you, Mom. You're the best mom in the world, and I appreciate everything you've done for me." Julia felt the tears spring into her eyes and gave Lee a tight hug in return.

"I'll call you in the morning. Maybe we can go out for coffee or lunch or something," Julia said.

"Sounds good," Lee said. "I may have to schedule it around my writing time. I have a feeling that my writer's block is unblocked. My brain is racing with ideas, given all that's been going on."

After the departure of Lee's family, Elena said goodnight to Julia and Jack, pleading exhaustion, and headed to the guest room.

Jack and Julia were standing in the great room, and Jack turned to her and said, "Well, it looks like it's just us."

Julia smiled and nodded, saying, "Stay for awhile, if you can. I'm too wound up to sleep. I'd appreciate the company."

"It would be my pleasure, ma'am," Jack said.

"May I get you anything?" Julia asked. "More dessert? A drink?"

"No, thanks," Jack said. "I'm fine."

Julia gestured to the couch, and they both sat down. Jack leaned back, stretched, then said, "It's been quite a hair-raising few days."

"That's for sure," Julia agreed. "I don't ever want an experience like that again. You and Casey are accustomed to that kind of excitement, no, chaos, from your police work. And Lee writes about those kinds of escapades in her thrillers. But me, I'm just a boring Midwest grandmother."

Jack burst out laughing.

"Julia, you're anything but a boring Midwest grandmother. You're a beautiful, vibrant woman with an interesting career, a loving family, a brilliant mind...shall I go on?"

Julia was blushing but she said, "Please do. You're turning my head."

Jack reached out and took Julia's hand. She turned and looked into his eyes. She was surprised and yet not surprised to see the emotion on his face.

"This may not be the appropriate time for what I'm about to say, but who cares." He took a deep breath, then continued. "Well, let's start out easy. How about dinner with me tomorrow night?"

Julia hesitated before answering, thinking about the man sitting next to her, thinking about his invitation to dinner. Then she broke into a broad smile and said, "I'd love to have dinner with you, Jack."

THE END