

PROLOGUE

This wasn't murder. No sirree, Bob. Murder was something criminals did, and that's the last thing he was. This might be a complication that required cleanup, but that's about it. Definitely not something that might fall into the scofflaw category. He had morals as well as a distinct belief in right and wrong. Criminals didn't, and that's what set him far apart from the felons.

Blood dripped from his hands as he plowed the shovel into the dirt again and again. Sweat trickled down his back and dampened the hair at the nape of his neck. The evening was deep and dark, and he didn't dare use a light. The chance of anyone coming by this time of night was slim. Still, it didn't hurt to take precautions. Besides, he didn't really need any kind of light to do his work. He was as comfortable here as if he and the darkness shared a soul. Nighttime was his favorite, which—given his mission—was good. A pansy afraid of the dark would fail miserably in his line of work.

The hole grew deeper with each shovelful of dirt he tossed out onto the blue tarp spread wide on the grass. What he was trying to accomplish needed to be right. Or more precisely, perfect. And it was. He stopped shoveling and crawled out of the hole.

The second blue tarp, this one tied with an extensive length of paracord, rolled easily into the hole. For a long moment, he stood at the edge of his carefully crafted crevasse and stared. Then he picked up the shovel and began to fill it once again with rich earth. When the dirt reached the top, was packed level, and the turf back in place, it was as if nothing had disturbed the ground. The beauty of it made

him smile. His father always said, “A job worth doing is worth doing right.” *Well, Daddy, I did this job right.*

Slowly he folded the tarp, taking care to ensure any loose dirt stayed within the folds. He tossed the shovel into the bed of his pickup and tucked the tarp into the diamond-plate toolbox mounted behind the cab. Keys in hand, he pulled open the driver’s door and then paused. A wise man would leave now, and he considered himself a very wise man. As he debated, he tightened his grip on the door handle. *Get in. Go, before someone drives by and sees you.*

Sighing, he stepped away from the truck door, closed it, and returned to the spot where a moment before he’d worked up a sweat. Staring down at the grass he’d carefully replaced so no one would notice any kind of disturbance, he felt his heart start to beat like a freight train and his breath begin to hitch. A light rain fell from the sky, yet he still didn’t return to his truck. He’d done this enough times already to know his work was good and, more importantly, his own private secret—forever.

Walking away this time was impossible, and he understood why. Understanding didn’t change how he felt. This one was different from the rest. Much more personal and far more important. His head bowed and his hands in his pockets, he stood still as death. The rain picked up in intensity until it dripped down his hair and onto his face, where it mixed with his tears.

CHAPTER ONE

“Son of a bitch.” Lorna Dutton spit her mouthful of coffee all over the morning newspaper. With the back of her hand she wiped her mouth and then slapped the soggy paper down on the kitchen table. “When is this shit going to stop?”

Honestly, enough already. She’d moved out here on the Washington Coast to get away from people, not to end up in *The Seattle Times*, yet there she was in all her smiling—or was that grimacing—glory. Her face was front and center on page one of a newspaper with a circulation in the hundreds of thousands. Page fucking one!

All right, it just might be a pretty good story. After all, solving the mystery of a Makah woman missing for over a hundred years made for a great human-interest article. Or newscast. Or Internet video clip. That John McCafferty, the original owner of the house she now lived in, had murdered Catherine Swan, the Makah woman, then buried her in the yard, wasn’t an original story, but how she’d uncovered the truth was. Good old-fashioned psychic ability, and pretty much the last thing she wanted to be known for made for a story sure to capture the reading public’s attention. It didn’t seem to interest anyone that she’d written training manuals for not one but three Fortune 500 companies. Now that was something she wouldn’t mind seeing on the front page of the newspaper.

Didn’t seem to matter what she wanted. The minute she moved into the house she inherited from her great-aunt, her latent psychic abilities began to get stronger and stronger until she solved the century-old mystery. Even as isolated as they were out here, the story

still managed to work its way through just about every news outlet in the state. Instead of isolation and a chance to rest and renew, she'd morphed into a strange sort of celebrity. Not the kind that brought her technical-writing jobs either. That would be a helpful sort of celebrity status.

But no, it couldn't be that easy. Rather than connecting her name with real jobs writing books, manuals, and trade materials, all people knew about her was that she could see ghosts.

Sucked to be her.

The story did, however, have two upsides. First, she wasn't in the psychic realm all by herself. When her brother Jeremy had showed up, the old paranormal bug had managed to hit him square on too. Actually Jeremy didn't have much latent psychic ability, but he was an open type of person, which made him easy pickings for a hostile spirit. Now that they'd banished the spirit of the asshole who built the house and murdered his daughter's lover, nothing preternatural seemed to be bothering Jeremy any longer. Still, it was nice to have someone around who could relate. Most people couldn't even if they wanted to, and those that said they could were by and large the crazy ones.

The second perk, and in her opinion the best, was Renee. Lorna's heart took a big leap every time she thought about her. When Lorna inherited the house, she also inherited, so to speak, the housekeeper, Jolene Austin. Jolene's daughter Renee was a lovely woman with long dark hair and gorgeous eyes. By herself, Renee was fantastic, interesting, and beautiful. It also didn't hurt that she'd brought Clancy along with her. Probably less than a minute after he put his big head in her lap and turned his expressive eyes on her, she was a goner. Lorna loved the big German shepherd as if he'd been part of her life for years.

The whole reason Renee came to the house was tragic. A fire in the building she owned in downtown Seattle had gutted her business on the main floor and so smoke-damaged her living quarters on the second floor she couldn't live there until extensive repairs were completed. More than happy to invite her to stay at the house on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, Lorna extended a heartfelt invitation. The house was huge, with plenty of room for what turned out to be a

makeshift kind of family consisting of Lorna, Jeremy, his pregnant girlfriend Merry, Jolene, and Renee. Oh, and Clancy, of course.

The truth of why she relocated so far from her childhood home was a tired old story. She came here to disappear after her long-time girlfriend, Anna, decided for both of them the relationship was over. Might have been nice if they'd talked it through first, but that's not the way it played out. Anna moved on before Lorna even knew it was over. After the relationship implosion she just wanted to hide out here all alone and train for her first Ironman triathlon. Well, train and feel sorry for herself in a way that was pretty embarrassing when she looked back on it. Somebody should have given her a big old bitch-slap alongside the head instead of allowing her to mope, whine, and cry. Luckily her self-imposed isolation was brief and she'd never been happier. Best intentions and all that.

Notwithstanding her current good feelings, right now she was sick and tired of the publicity her discovery of the body of Catherine Swan generated. She resented it, actually, for a multitude of reasons. Solitude wasn't an objective these days like it was when she first moved here, and that was okay. Privacy was a different matter. If she had her way, the whole psychic thing could disappear as quickly as it appeared. That wasn't going to happen, judging by the rabid attention her unusual talent seemed to garner.

Her reluctance to embrace her psychic ability aside, Catherine's remains were returned to her family and the Makah Tribe. A wrong perpetuated against a lovely young woman so long ago was put right. What only the inhabitants of the house knew, though, was discovering Catherine's remains also connected her spirit with the love of her life, Tiana McCafferty, the only daughter of John McCafferty. Took Lorna awhile to figure it out, but she finally realized Tiana was earthbound as she waited for someone to reunite her with Catherine. Once it happened, the spirits of both Catherine and Tiana were free at last.

She saw them together, a love so strong it defied death, and her heart ached for the travesty visited upon the two women. Until she met Renee that kind of love was an elusive dream far out of her reach. Every day she spent with Renee she understood a little more about the bond between Catherine and Tiana that kept them bound to the earth decade after decade.

Reuniting the two lovers allowed them to leave this place and go into the light, or wherever peaceful spirits go. She felt good about that, except it left the house feeling a little empty. Tiana's essence filled the place with an energy she couldn't touch but could sure as hell feel. She missed the spirit of the beautiful young woman whose only crime was to love another so deeply it enraged her father enough to propel him to commit murder.

It was time to put it all to rest, especially the part that shone the spotlight squarely on her. Lately, people were actually driving by as if trying to glimpse the *psychic*. Circus performer wasn't on her bucket list.

If she didn't have the picture staring up at her she could pretend nobody was paying any attention to her. She wadded up the newspaper and tossed it toward the trashcan just as Renee came into the kitchen.

A single eyebrow went up as she cut her gaze first to Lorna and then at the damp newspaper that missed the trash can by a pretty wide margin. "Practicing your three-point shot?" She poured herself a cup of coffee and looked at Lorna over the rim of the mug.

"Never had one," she admitted with honesty and a smile. Her heart was lighter at the sight of Renee dressed in pink-flowered flannel pants and a bright-yellow T-shirt. Unlike Lorna, who preferred primary colors, Renee embraced bright and cheerful. Her choice worked for her in a way it never would for Lorna, and it always made her smile. She pushed away from the table and got up to retrieve the wadded paper from where it landed on the floor.

"What made you want to crush the paper before anyone else could read it?"

She cocked her head and studied the missed shot. There was a reason she never made the varsity basketball team. "As my grandmother used to say, I'll give you three guesses and the first two don't count." She picked up the newspaper and stuffed it into the trash before sitting back down in her chair at the table her long legs crossed.

Renee laughed, her eyes sparkling. "Gosh, that narrows it right down. I'd have to say that something in there was about one beautiful and talented psychic. Did my first guess get close?"

"Ding, ding, ding...you're a winner." She held up her coffee mug in a mock toast.

“Sweetheart.” Renee walked over and ran a hand across Lorna’s hair before planting a kiss on the top of her head. “You gotta stop letting these things get to you. The truth is, whether you like it or not, God gave you a gift, and you’ve already used it for the greater good.”

Lorna rolled her eyes as she leaned into Renee’s hand where it still rested against her head. “Okay, Gandhi.”

Renee’s laugh was like a ray of sunshine. “I prefer Mother Theresa. But seriously, Lorna, you’re unique and what you did was incredibly special. Yeah, it’s kind of exploitive of journalists to keep using it to sell papers, but it doesn’t diminish what you are, honey. Just roll with it for now, and as *my* grandmother used to say...this too shall pass.”

“I sure as hell hope your granny was right ’cause this shit needs to pass.”

“She never let me down. It will pass, I promise.” She kissed the top of Lorna’s head again.



Thea Lynch paced the length of her office, the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach refusing to lessen. Three days, three incredibly long days, and still nothing. Not a single call, not a clue, nothing. Her sister was missing and nobody knew a goddamn thing. Worse, nobody seemed to care except her.

She glanced at the silent phone and cursed it under her breath. From the moment Grant called her, she’d been a wreck. Actually that wasn’t right either; she was rattled long before that. She’d sensed before his call that something was wrong with Alida. It’d always been that way with them. Everything people said about twins was true in their case. Their connection was more than physical; it was spiritual.

Now that her worst fears appeared to be true, she didn’t know what to do or where to turn for help. The company truck Alida was driving three days ago was found at a sub-station with the doors open, her backpack on the seat, and the keys in the ignition. Everything was there except her sister. How could that be? There was nothing around the sub-station, nowhere for her to go. People—her sister—didn’t simply disappear.

The police checked over the truck, and searchers went out for hours to try to find her, or at least a trace of her. Nothing came of it. Alida vanished as if she were part of a magician's disappearing act.

Thea had come into work today hoping for a little distraction, but that turned out to be fruitless because so far she wasn't getting a damn thing done. How could she? Alida was in trouble, and she didn't have the first idea of how to help.

After a couple of hours she gave up and, leaving everything in the hands of her very capable staff, returned home. At least she could be here in case Alida called or, better yet, showed up. Nothing would be better than to open her front door and see her standing on the front steps. Pressing her fingers to her closed eyes she took long, deep breaths. *Please, God, bring her home.*

The ping of the doorbell made her jump and her eyes flew open. Her first thought was Alida. How she hoped God was answering her silent prayer. With her heart pounding, she ran to the front door and peered through the peephole. Her hopes crashed. It wasn't Alida standing outside but a stranger.

Slowly, she swung the door open to a policewoman. The woman standing in her doorway might be wearing plain clothes, but she screamed cop. Dark-blue cargo pants, a tan button-down shirt, and black leather boots were not the attire of the businesswomen she knew. Her dark hair brushed the collar of her shirt, the cut severe, but it worked with the sharp lines of her face. For at least a moment, Thea felt something besides fear, which wasn't totally unwelcome even if her unexpected visitor was in law enforcement.

"Theadora Lynch?" Her voice was low and a little deep, and it matched the rest of her in an interesting way that very much appealed to Thea. Her hopes ratcheted up just a little bit.

She nodded. "Yes, I'm Thea."

The vision in cop chic stepped forward and held out her hand. "I'm Deputy Sheriff Katie Carlisle from the investigations unit of the Sheriff's Department. I need to talk to you about your sister Alida. I'm sorry to bother you at home, but it's quite important. I promise not to take up too much of your time."

A couple of others had come by right after the power company Alida worked for reported her missing. At the time she was so

overwhelmed by the idea Alida was gone she barely remembered what she told them. What she did recall was her disenchantment with the two men. They obviously didn't believe Alida was taken against her will. In fact, they implied she simply took off and following up on her was a waste of their time. She was glad someone else was here now—a different set of eyes and hopefully a mind more open than the last two.

She accepted the offered hand and wrapped her fingers around a warm palm. The woman's handshake was firm, confident. "Yes, please. Come on in and have a seat." Up close her eyes were a warm brown that radiated strength. Yes indeed, she was really glad the Sheriff's Department had sent someone else for this follow-up visit. Maybe she'd judged the first two unfairly when she felt they were blowing her off or not, considering they didn't come themselves. No matter, someone was here and that's what was important.

In the living room, the woman sat on the edge of the cushion in one of the club chairs. "Thank you for giving me a little of your time." She opened a small tablet she pulled from her pocket.

"What can I do for you, Deputy?" Thea sat in the chair across from her. "The other two from your office didn't seem very interested in any information I could offer that might help to find my sister."

An expression that might have been annoyance flashed quickly across the woman's face before being replaced by a look far more sympathetic. "Please, call me Katie, and I want to hear about the day your sister disappeared. I'm sorry about your prior interview, and I apologize if my colleagues gave you the impression your assistance wasn't important. I'm very interested in anything and everything you can tell me about her."

At the mention of Alida, tears pricked the back of Thea's eyes and her foot started to tap. She still couldn't fathom the reality that for three days no one had seen or heard from her. Alida just didn't do things like that. She possessed quirks, as did everyone, but that didn't mean she was a flake or that she ran away without a word to anyone, especially her. No one was ever going to convince her of that.

Once more Thea pressed her fingers against closed eyes as she took a couple of deep breaths. The possibility that Alida could be dead darted through her mind. She reminded herself not to automatically

jump to the worst-case scenario. Typically she was a glass-half-full kind of woman and embraced the positive in any situation. Alida probably wasn't dead. Perhaps she was hurt and needed help. She didn't have her cell phone; that was why she didn't call for assistance. Just because three days had passed without a word didn't mean she was dead.

Except Thea couldn't shake the dread that pooled in the pit of her stomach since the first moment she learned Alida was gone. No matter how she came at it, this was different. It felt dark and desolate.

Thea opened her eyes, looked over, and met Katie's eyes. "She's just gone. One day she was there and then nothing. Her company truck was at her last stop with the doors open. She left her bag on the seat and keys in the ignition. All her stuff was there. Who walks away like that? I can tell you one thing without any doubt—not my sister."

So far Katie hadn't made notes on her tablet. Her eyes were on Thea. "I've seen both the pictures and the spot where her truck was located. Nothing jumped out at me. So, indulge me and walk me through your interactions that day. Let's see if we can come up with anything together."

Thea thought back to the morning three days ago, focusing beyond the top of Katie's head. She wanted to pick out what was different, anything that might now turn out to be a clue. The sad reality was nothing jumped out at her no matter how hard she concentrated on remembering that day. "Alida called me about two." She brought her gaze back to Katie's face. The good thing was, Katie appeared interested.

"Was that unusual?"

As much as she wanted to tell her yes, she shook her head. "No. She called me just about every day to share funny things that happened along the way. You see, I'm a graphic artist and spend so much of my time either hunched over a computer or helping one of my staff, I don't get out much. It was different for her. Alida's out all the time, every day. The things she sees are crazy, and the colorful way she describes them to me are just the adventures I need when I get wrapped up in a project."

"Nothing after that call?" Katie's head was now bent as she made notes on her tablet.

Thea's heart ached as the despair of the last three days washed over her anew. She wanted to scream and cry at the same time. Not that she intended to succumb to crippling emotion. She planned to keep it together. "I haven't heard a thing since that call. Something happened to her, Deputy. I feel it right here." She tapped her chest. It was always hard to explain to non-twins how deep the connection was. Though they looked alike, they were two distinct individuals with their own likes, dislikes, and quirks. At the same time, they were, in many ways, two halves of a whole. That's why they were so in tune with each other. That's why she knew something was very wrong.

Katie looked up from her tablet and studied her with those deep, dark eyes. "What do you think might have happened?"

God, how she wished she knew. The gut-wrenching feeling in the pit of her stomach screamed for answers, yet she possessed not a shred of helpful information. Slowly she shook her head. "I don't know, and to tell you the truth it hurts to even consider what it could be."

"What about her husband?"

"Grant?" Thea's thoughts shifted to the tall, good-looking man who worshipped his wife even if he had a wandering eye...which he did. "No way. Trust me, they had their problems, but they were the kind of couple who found a way to work things out. I don't believe he would or could ever hurt her. Cheat on her, yes. Kill her, never. He'd take a bullet for her."

Katie nodded and made a couple more notes before looking over at her again. "Okay, so for the moment we'll rule out her husband. How about other people who might have a grudge or be upset with her? Did she say anything to you in the days before she disappeared? Anything seem unusual or uncomfortable? Was somebody hanging around who made her uneasy?"

She'd expected this question and had been thinking about it since Alida vanished. She nodded slowly as she recalled Alida's concerns. "Not directly but she mentioned that it felt like someone was watching her when she was out in the field. She told me she'd never seen anyone and nothing ever happened. But it made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up."

She didn't want Katie to think her sister was paranoid because she wasn't. On the other hand, at the moment she was scared enough for Alida to throw out anything and everything to the attractive woman who was the first one who seemed to believe Alida might be in real danger. Besides, she was so emotionally involved she wasn't rational. Sharing everything she could think of with this deputy was sure to help sort out the crap from the critical.

Katie leaned toward Thea and held her eyes. "Trust me, you don't ever want to discount feelings. Sometimes they're the thread that leads us straight to the answers."

It was as if she listened to Thea's thoughts. For the first time in three days she felt a flicker of something like hope. Someone was listening and, more importantly, seemed to care. She and Grant weren't alone anymore. She almost let the tears threatening to fall burst forth.

CHAPTER TWO

The Watcher hoped that helping the souls of the two wronged women reunite would clear his path to heaven. He was mistaken. While they'd found their way from this world and into the light, he was still here. That they were home at last pleased him. That he remained tethered to the earth made his heart heavy. All he could do was watch, wait, and hope his time would come.

From the lengthening shadows, he studied the house on the bluff. Big and well-built, it had withstood the elements decade after decade while protecting those within from the ravages of Mother Nature. Tonight was no different. The wind howled and thick clouds tried to blot out the stars. The ocean waves pounding against the rocks at his back were a familiar lullaby. Cool ocean spray dampened his long black hair. It didn't matter if he was cold and wet. All that concerned him were those who lived within the big old house, and as he stood vigil, lights came on inside, pushing away the darkness.

Years ago this house was filled with sadness and death. Then she came and, together with the others, restored hope and light. But their work was not yet complete. He pinned his hopes on the other two women who were saved from limbo. However, now he understood his fate wasn't tied to the two of a century past, but to the woman of this time and place whom God had gifted with the sight.

She was reluctant. She was defiant. She was brilliant.

The Watcher stood impossibly tall in the dimming light, his nearly seven-foot frame blending with the shadows as if they were one. His fall from grace happened so long ago, and in the intervening

centuries he was filled with the desire to once again walk through the gates of heaven. He tried again and again to redeem his soul, hoping God would grant him mercy.

Many times his heart was heavy and hope slipped away like the waves of the ocean that crashed against the rocks, only to then glide away into the massive eternity of the sea. Then a glimmer of something glorious would restore his faith, and he once again believed in the power of forgiveness. In her face now shone a ray of that indefinable something that swept over him like a lighthouse beacon. Together, he and this woman would right what was wrong, and one day he would leave this place and return to his home beyond the sky. She would push aside the darkness that had been his prison through the ages and open a world of light to him once more.

Tonight, however, in his soul lingered a worrisome thread of danger. Something was wrong, and she once more was the key to making it right. His vision was blurred, but somewhere in the distance, the image struggled to clear itself. A faraway cry drifted on the night air, sending chills up his arms.

At the big windows looking out over the ocean, her face suddenly appeared, pale and intent. Staring into the distance she stood motionless, searching as he did, for what exactly he did not know. Whatever it was, whoever it was, their spirit called to the two who heard the plea sighing on the wind. Neither could ignore it even if they wished to do so.

Satisfied for the moment, he stepped back and farther into the shadows. He would ready himself for the task ahead and do his best to guide her to the awaiting destiny, so that she in turn could usher him to his. His head bowed, he moved his lips in a silent prayer, speaking in a language long since wiped from the earth.

His body shook, his face blurred. Then he was gone.



Katie kicked off her boots, leaving them where they landed with a thud right outside the closet door, then threw her shirt on the bed and slithered out of her cargo pants. She replaced them with a pair of shorts and a sweatshirt with cut-off sleeves. Now, that was

better. Nothing facilitated the thinking process like old, comfortable clothes. For about a millisecond she thought about picking everything up. Grandma used to always remark that cleanliness was next to godliness. For her money, a certain amount of disarray and clutter made her home feel lived in and cozy. In her book, that was plenty close enough to godliness.

From the fridge she snagged a nice dark Porter and carried it to the living room. Usually she was good at leaving her work at work. Tonight wasn't one of those times when she could walk away. Actually, more than the gorgeous Theadora Lynch made her mind whirl. And Thea was most assuredly gorgeous. With thick black hair that hung down her back and eyes the color of a summer sky, the woman made Katie want to just sit there and stare. What was it about the combination of black hair and blue eyes that sent her heart pounding? She was most definitely a sucker.

Fortunately, Katie was still professional enough to keep her mind off Thea's hotness and onto the issue of her missing twin sister. The case itself intrigued her. For the most part, missing adults didn't garner a whole lot of resources, or even thought for that matter. The vast majority were people who simply didn't want to be found. Some planned their escape with great detail, while others came across a chance to disappear and simply took it.

A fair number of legitimate missing persons' cases did exist, where something went terribly wrong and harm occurred to the one who disappeared. In a great many of those cases, family or acquaintances were involved with said harm. Precisely why, despite what she told Thea, Alida's husband Grant was very high on her list of people to investigate. Law enforcement looked first to professed loved ones for a very good reason.

There was a weird feeling to this case, and Katie wanted to know why. Traditional odds were on the husband, yet her gut instinct was to look way outside the box to find the truth behind Alida's disappearance. Vanishing in broad daylight didn't feel right for this particular woman.

She wasn't about to say that to any of the other deputies. She'd earned her shield and was damn proud of it. The fact that her grandfather, father, and brother were all in law enforcement before

her only meant that she had great teachers, not that they opened the door for her. Not everyone saw it that way. Escaping the “you’re only here because of your family” was nearly impossible. Just because no one said it to her face didn’t mean it wasn’t out there. The only thing she could do was prove herself over and over. It wasn’t fair but it was her reality. Slowly she was winning the battle with the guys, even though it sure as hell got old.

So in this instance, she was damn well going to keep her gut instincts to herself. At least until she could prove she was right on the money. As far as she was concerned, the family of Alida Lynch Canwell wasn’t involved with her disappearance. Grant Canwell was clearly distraught, and if he was acting he should be up for an Academy Award. Even if he was still on her list of possible suspects, she didn’t believe he was that good an actor. Men didn’t fake the kind of emotion he displayed during her interview with him earlier today.

The sister was, like Alida’s husband, so full of worry it glared from her eyes. The fact the two women were twins made Katie feel even stronger that Alida didn’t simply walk away from her life. Something else had happened out there at the isolated power station, and a bad feeling the ending wasn’t going to be a happy one lingered. Sometimes she really hated the knowledge that came with this job. It was hard to remain optimistic when the statistics pointed in the opposite direction. Still, she intended to give a good try.

Opening her tablet, she pulled up the electronic file. In it were jpgs of every angle of the last place Alida was seen. There was her truck, with the doors open and the bag sitting undisturbed on the seat. She didn’t care how anyone came at it, this wasn’t a *typical* disappearance, and Katie was going to find out what went wrong and why.

After a long pull of the beer, she rested her head against the sofa back and closed her eyes. She was given the case because no one thought it could be solved. No witnesses, no suspects, no motive. If the good old boys wanted to prove she had no business being a deputy, this could be the case that would give them the evidence they wanted to back up their belief.

Well, fuck the good old boys. Her relatives didn’t get her this job. She earned it all on her own. At the same time, she wasn’t stupid. She was determined to use her family’s shared knowledge from

decades of experience to find Alida Canwell. And when she did, all the backbiters, women haters, and chauvinists would have to shut the hell up once and for all.



“Do you ever have the feeling you’re being watched?” Lorna stood in the living room staring out the big windows at the inky black night. Few stars shone through the cloud-shrouded sky though for a change it wasn’t raining, yet. All day she’d sensed eyes on her, though as far as she could tell nobody was around. The sensation was so strong she couldn’t ignore it.

“I watch you all the time,” Renee said cheerfully.

Lorna turned and smiled at her. Renee lounged on the sofa. Dressed in yoga pants and a bright-pink jersey shirt a couple sizes too big, her long hair loose and flowing, she was stretched out and obviously comfortable. She was also beautiful. Just looking at her took Lorna’s breath away, and for the hundredth time she wondered how she ever got lucky enough to meet someone like her. Or that someone like Renee loved her back. It was a miracle.

“I don’t mean *you*.” Besides Lorna and Renee, there was Renee’s mother Jolene, who’d been the housekeeper here for decades, Lorna’s brother Jeremy, and his fiancée Merry. She wasn’t referring to any of them. Whoever, or whatever, watched her today, it wasn’t one of her peeps.

Renee tilted her head as she looked at Lorna. “Who’s going to be watching you clear out here? We’re not exactly on the beaten path.”

Under normal circumstances Lorna would agree with her. “Couldn’t tell that by all the curiosity seekers that just happen to come by lately.” Since word had first circulated about Catherine and Tiana, people drove by every day and many nights. Maybe it was one of them and she was letting the irritation of being on the psychic radar get on her nerves. Except she was pretty sure that wasn’t it.

“True story, baby. I grew up here and have never seen so many people out this way. This too shall pass and things will get back to normal. Once the newness of your powers fades, folks will forget all about you.”

Normal? She wasn't sure she even knew what that was anymore. If she needed proof of her altered reality, today gave it to her. The curious hadn't caused her uneasiness. It was something else. "God, I hope people get tired of us soon. But that's not what I'm talking about. I stand here looking out at the ocean, and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I swear someone's out there in the darkness watching me, and it creeps the hell out of me."

Renee got up from the sofa and joined her at the windows, sliding an arm around her waist. "Baby, it's probably your new powers playing games with your reality. I mean, think about it. You have this phenomenal ability to see things in another dimension. It doesn't seem like it would be a stretch for your spidey senses to be in overdrive. You know, someone or *something* could be watching you...from another dimension."

Perfect, that's just what she needed, another spirit stalking her. Once was enough, thank you very much. Except Renee's take on it made sense in a lot of ways. This whole psychic thing was pretty fucking weird, and now that it was turned on, it didn't seem to intend to turn off anytime soon. She wasn't exactly sure what to do about it either. She really wanted it to turn off. One encounter with spirits from another realm was way plenty for her. It wouldn't break her heart if it never happened again.

With a sigh she turned and kissed the top of Renee's head, loving the sweet scent of vanilla that was so her. "You're probably right...at least I hope so. It bothers me to think somebody's out there skulking around the property hiding behind trees and peeking in our windows. Ghosts at least make a weird kind of sense. Stalkers don't. Who in their right mind would want to stalk me anyway? I'm pretty boring."

Renee laughed softly "I beg to differ, sweetheart. Don't sell yourself short. I think you're pretty fascinating."

"You're blinded by lust."

Renee laughed, gave her a squeeze, and let go to turn toward the windows. "True enough, my lovely." She leaned close to the glass, put her hands on either side of her face, and peered out into the darkness. "I don't see a thing. No ghosts. No stalkers. I'm thinking you're safe tonight. Now come on. Mom made one of her famous pies, and I, for one, want to get to it before Jeremy dives in."

Lorna laughed and grabbed Renee's hand. Once again this wonderful woman took her dark mood and turned it into lightness and joy. Pie it was. "Damn straight. That boy can still out eat any teenager in the county. I don't know where he puts it or why he doesn't weigh five hundred pounds."

"What boy?" Jeremy's voice came from the doorway.

Lorna and Renee looked at each other, laughed, and ran for the kitchen, Jeremy following right behind.

CHAPTER THREE

Thea was surprised by the call from the cute deputy sheriff who'd been so understanding though a little aloof. Despite that, Katie seemed to be genuinely interested in finding Alida, and that was something Thea needed desperately right now. Katie could be as distant as she wanted as long as she found her sister.

Not knowing what had happened hurt her heart. Not knowing what to do to find her was tearing her apart. She would accept any and all help.

Now after Katie called and asked her to ride along to the spot where Alida's truck was discovered abandoned, Thea felt real hope for the first time in days. Her request might be unusual, but objectionable? Not at all. In fact, her stomach fluttered a little at the idea of riding all the way out to the transfer station on the outskirts of town. The thought of standing on the ground where Alida stood caused part of it, though the other part had nothing at all to do with her sister.

Okay, face it, she thought. The deputy was hot. No. More like smoking. Two years ago Thea and her girlfriend Sue had mutually ended their three-year relationship. After that, nobody garnered more than passing interest. It wasn't that Sue broke her heart and she couldn't move past it. Not even close. It was more that the two of them simply grew apart until one day they seemed more like good friends than lovers or soul mates. They'd moved on from each other, and since then Thea had focused on her career and building her company. Romance and passion took a backseat. Who could find lifelong love when work was a seven-day-a-week endeavor? Besides, did she even

have a soul mate, or was she just dreaming of something that would never be?

But yesterday when she opened the door and found Katie standing on her porch, suddenly she felt alive and tingly in all the right places. She couldn't remember the last time she felt that way or if she ever even had. The timing was insanely inappropriate, but her heart didn't care. Something about Katie Carlisle spoke to her soul.

Of course, whether Katie felt that way about her, or any woman for that matter, was currently a mystery. For all she knew, Katie could have a boyfriend or a husband, but she sure hoped not.

Outside, the sound of a car pulling into her driveway took her away from her thoughts. She grabbed her bag and headed out. Katie was halfway up the walk by the time Thea pulled the front door shut. Like yesterday, Katie was all cop in her cargo pants, dark shirt, and leather boots.

"Thanks for coming along," Katie said. Her voice and her eyes were serious, all business. That could be professional courtesy or the sign Thea hoped not to see.

At the same time, Thea appreciated her cool, professional manner. Yes, she was most definitely attracted to this tall, graceful deputy, but this wasn't about her; it was about Alida. Once her sister was found and brought home, safely, she prayed, she would have plenty of time to see if her thing for Katie might stand a chance of becoming something special.

They both turned and walked back toward the dark-blue SUV. "I appreciate your asking me to ride along," Thea told her. Even though she didn't think she could contribute much, just riding along made her feel like she was doing something, and that helped push the feeling of helplessness aside. "Is this an official vehicle?" She slid into the passenger's seat. Truthfully, it looked more like a soccer-mom car than a sheriff's cruiser. No fancy gear, no guns, no computers. Didn't all the modern police vehicles have computers these days? Was Katie a married soccer mom? Her heart sank just a little at the thought.

Katie shook her head, buckled her seatbelt, and then checked her mirrors. As she backed out of the driveway she said, "No, this is my personal vehicle. I want to go to the transfer station without

drawing more attention than necessary. There's nothing on my car to alert people that I'm police. Sometimes it's better that way."

Well, maybe her car didn't scream law enforcement, but didn't she realize that one glimpse of her and people would know? She rocked the "look," for lack of a better explanation. Combine that with the handgun in a holster at her waist, and she just didn't appear to be the average gawker driving around a potential crime scene for a quick look and to snap a photo for posting to social network. No, Katie Carlisle looked all cop, and it was a look Thea liked a lot.

On the flip side, it comforted her to not be under scrutiny, so to speak. It was bad enough that Alida was gone, but she hated all the questions people threw her way. Sure, they meant to be helpful, but instead they sent daggers into her heart. "Do you think she ran away?" "Were Alida and Grant having problems?" "Do you think she's dead?"

Just the thought of answering the last one made her shudder. No way was she going there. Alida was alive. She had to be, and with Katie's help they would find her.

Keeping a positive attitude was great, except she couldn't ignore that painful nagging sensation in the pit of her stomach. She refused to give it a name, and if anyone asked, she'd pass it off as stress. This was going to turn out all right. It was. Period.

Thea watched out the window as they drove north up Highway 395. It was undoubtedly one of the most beautiful areas around here. Washington State was so diverse in its landscape, and each difference was lovely in its own way. Here the road took gentle curves and slow ascents. As they drove farther north, the trees grew thicker, the houses farther apart, and businesses thinned.

A few miles past the Wandemere Mall, the last cluster of retail businesses before the landscape turned into a combination of residential and agricultural, Katie took a right onto a rough road. She followed it about a quarter of mile before they reached a turnout where a small transfer station was surrounded by a six-foot chain-link fence. Tears pricked at the back of Thea's eyes. She hadn't been here before, but she recognized the place just the same.

The padlocked gate was just as she'd seen in the pictures. To the right of the gate stood a sign post topped by a sign that read *AUTHORIZED*

PERSONNEL ONLY. In her mind's eyes, she saw the dark-green Ford truck parked right in front of the sign, both the driver and passenger doors open, and scuff marks in the gravel outside the driver's door. The scene was seared into her memory as though she'd stood here when it all went down. God, how she wanted to believe that Alida was safe somewhere and that those scuff marks meant nothing heinous.

Katie brought the SUV to a stop, put it in park, and turned off the engine. Slowly Thea opened her door and got out. Equally as slowly, she walked toward the sign she'd seen only in photographs so far. A slight breeze ruffled the air, bringing with it the scent of alfalfa, plowed fields, and ranging cattle. Looking down at the parking area, she spotted the faintest hint of scuff marks in the loose gravel. Her breath caught in her throat, and she needed to give herself a moment to collect her emotions before she could walk closer.

What would Alida do if their roles were reversed? Thea always considered her to be the stronger of the two. Smart and kind as well. It took her only a second to know what Alida would do if she were standing here now. She would charge forward to reunite them, and so that's exactly what Thea planned to do. Still staring at the disturbed gravel, she kneeled and touched the drag marks with the tips of her fingers. As she did, a shot of energy soared through her body.



His power peaked when darkness blanketed the world, and yet now with the light of day still clinging, he felt the charge as though someone had hit him with a thousand volts of electricity. His body jerked and his head whipped back. With the shot came a flash of vision, and his mouth opened in a silent scream. At last he saw.

Daylight lingered, not yet fading into night, and the Watcher kept to the shadows that the thick trees created. He turned his eyes to the east and stared at the sky, today clear and blue without a hint of storm. He could almost see her. Pain tore at her heart, and fear wrapped its ugly fingers around her soul.

Evil walked the earth hundreds of miles away from this place where the ocean crashed against the rocks and the rain came too often. What it did in that place so far from here he could not see clearly,

only that the one whose tears fell to the earth needed help. Not his assistance, for he was tethered to this place as surely as if he were chained to the tree he stood beneath. She needed not him but *her*.

As he'd known it would, the heavens sent him a sign. She would once again do the Lord's work, and through her, his salvation would come one step closer. He could feel her soul, and though he rarely smiled, he did so now. She would not be happy, for this was not the calling she believed in. If he could tell her, he would: the destiny God bestowed upon each was rarely what one would choose for their own life. Not chosen but exactly what each needed nonetheless. How deeply he understood that one undeniable truth.

Of course, with thousands of years to reconcile that fact within his own heart he possessed a distinct advantage in that respect. She did not have a thousand years, or a hundred, or even one. She was forced to do the same in a matter of days. Her path was not for the weak or the frightened. She was strong and pure of heart. Thus, she would do what needed to be done and use the gift God blessed her with to make this earthly world a better place. That was her destiny.

Today that meant answering the call from an old friend. With his head bowed and his hands held together, he visualized a house, a desk, and a newspaper. He nodded and opened his eyes. It wasn't much, but for now it was enough. It would set into motion that which needed to happen.

Soon, she would make a journey across the mountains, and whatever evil tried to hide, she would bring into the light.



At the sound of Thea's scream, Katie raced to her side. Thea knelt in the gravel with both hands flat on the faint marks, seemingly evidence of Alida's apparent abduction. Thea's face was pasty white and her eyes were wild, as if the hounds of hell were chasing her. Katie's heart pounded, and she feared bringing Thea here was a huge mistake.

When she put her hands on Thea's shoulders, her body was shaking and cold to the touch. Definitely a big misstep. "What's wrong? What happened?"

Thea took a deep, shaky breath. “I don’t know. I touched this spot, and it was like someone hit me with a Taser. My whole body started to shake and my vision began to blur. I’ve never felt anything like it, and right now it’s all I can do not to throw up.”

“This was a bad idea,” Katie muttered as she put a hand under Thea’s arm and helped her to her feet. To Thea she said, “I need to take you home. I’m so sorry. I don’t know what the hell I was thinking.”

“No,” Thea snapped, standing up straight and shaking off Katie’s steadying hand. “No way am I leaving. Your idea to bring me here was dead on, and I’m not letting you run me home like I’m a sick little kid. I don’t know what just happened, and I don’t care if I feel like crap or throw up. This is the last place my sister was, and if being here, standing where she stood, can tell me something, then I’ll damned well listen.”

Color was returning to Thea’s face, and determination gleamed in her eyes. Admiration began to replace the panic and dismay from a moment before. Thea was right; she wasn’t some delicate little flower that needed to wait in the safety of her house while other people did all the work. Even though Thea was an artist, it was clear she could handle the hard stuff. Katie was liking her more and more. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d glimpsed this kind of strength in another woman.

“You’re sure?” She just had to ask.

Thea nodded and met her gaze square on. “One hundred percent. Someone has hurt my sister, and I plan to find the son of a bitch sooner rather than later.”

Katie looked around. The same vacant sense she got the first time she stopped here stayed with her. Usually at a crime scene something stood out, but not here. Everything screamed abduction, yet she couldn’t locate a single clue. One moment Alida Canwell had been here and the next she was gone, like a puff of smoke rising into oblivion in the sky. Frustrating didn’t even begin to describe how she felt.

“Did you see or even sense anything here?” Katie wasn’t about to dismiss feelings, particularly when it came to twins. A lot of things in this world defied explanation, and the connection between many twins was one of those things. If Thea’s scream was any indication of

the closeness between the two women, Katie hoped they possessed the special connection that could be the critical link to lead them to Alida.

For at least a full minute Thea stood motionless, staring into the distance as if seeing something, except the look in her eyes spoke more of sadness than connection. Slowly she shook her head. “When I touched the ground I felt like knives were going up my arms. Pain, anger, evil, and yet I didn’t even feel a flicker of *her*.” She closed her eyes and seemed to collect herself. “Katie, someone hurt my sister.”

The note of despair in Thea’s voice tore at Katie. She wanted to say or do something to ease her heartache, but there was nothing she could offer. They weren’t any closer to discovering what had happened to Alida than they were when the call first came in.

At the sound of wheels on the gravel drive, Katie turned. A dark-blue Yukon with county plates was slowly driving their way. She knew the rig. Undersheriff Vince Carl. He stopped and got out. As he walked their way, he oozed confidence and charm. At six five, with dark curly hair and sky-blue eyes, he was the kind of guy most women tripped over themselves to meet. She wasn’t one of those women, and it wasn’t just because she preferred women.

She knew Vince way too well. And most days, she couldn’t stand him.

“Hey, Katie, what’s up?”

She kept her words calm and professional, her expression neutral. His showing up here unannounced pissed her off, but she wasn’t about to let him know that. “Walking through the Canwell case. What are you doing here?”

He shrugged. “Driving by and saw you, that’s all.” A toothpick sticking out of the corner of his mouth bobbed up and down as he talked.

She narrowed her eyes and resisted the urge to snatch the stupid toothpick out of his mouth and fling it away. He was just driving by? Of course he was. “Clear out here? Kind of out of your way, isn’t it?”

Stopping next to her, he put his hands in his pockets, his stance relaxed and casual. The toothpick continued to bob. “Sure is, but this Canwell case bugs me, so I thought I’d drive around and see if anything struck me. Don’t like the way this thing dead-ends.”

Katie tried not to let her irritation show on her face or come out in her words. If she did, he would run straight to the boss and report how emotional she was. They were always on the alert to see if she could stay cool under pressure. “This is my case, Vince.” She was proud of how even her voice sounded. *Take that, you bastard.*

“Yeah, yeah, don’t get your panties in a bunch. I’m not horning in on your case. It just strikes me as too similar to an unsolved I came across, so I’m just keeping an eye out. That’s all. It’s what any investigator worth his salt would do. Who’s the chick?” He nodded toward Thea, who was standing about ten feet away staring once more into the distance.

This time Katie’s irritation flamed through, and she didn’t even try to stop her anger. Where did he get off? “The *woman* is Theadora Lynch, Alida Canwell’s twin sister.”

“Whoa, take it down a notch or two, Deputy Carlisle.” He finally tossed away the toothpick casually, as if nothing he said was worth her display of annoyance.

“Vince,” she snapped. “You take it down a notch or two, or would you prefer I mention to the chief that you referred to a victim’s sister as a chick?”

“You know I didn’t mean anything by it.” He rolled his eyes.

I know you’re a dick. “Doesn’t matter what you meant. It’s still inappropriate language, so keep it to yourself. This isn’t the fifties, and in case you missed the class, that’s what’s called sexual harassment. Now, perhaps you should be on your way before Ms. Lynch hears something like that come out of your mouth again and decides to report you. You go do your job and let me do mine.”

He shrugged as though every word she said slid off him like raindrops. “Whatever.”

She clenched her teeth against the fury she now barely managed to control. Vince was good at his job—she’d give him props for that—but he could get her back up quicker than anyone she’d ever met. The part that ticked her off the most is he did it on purpose. She just couldn’t figure out whether it was because he hated her or because he wanted to see if she really was as tough as the rest of them. As she watched him walk slowly back to his car, get in, and drive away, she

took several deep breaths to quiet her anger. He pulled off a pretty package, but under the wrapping, the guy was a total jerk.

Once Vince was gone, Katie turned her attention back to Thea. “Sorry about that. Vince is a colleague who unfortunately didn’t have much to help us.”

“A jerk,” Thea said absently.

Katie laughed, and the last of her irritation flowed away. “You picked that up?” A thousand-yard stare was on Thea’s face during the entire exchange with Vince. It surprised her she’d paid attention to any of their conversation.

Thea looked over at her and nodded. “His energy made me want to step back about a hundred feet or so. I’ve always been able to pick up people’s vibes immediately. Most are good, some are creepy, and some are just plain bad.”

“Well, Vince isn’t a bad guy. Just a creepy one in a male-chauvinistic kind of way.”

“Probably,” Thea said softly as she gazed out into the distance. “But a step-back kind of guy in any event.”

What about Vince made her voice so quiet and reflective? Katie tilted her head and studied Thea, who was once more focusing on the trees and hills beyond as if hoping to catch sight of her sister. What did she mean by *probably*?

CHAPTER FOUR

Thea was glad the man left. The vibes he brought to this place were dark and disturbing. Maybe she was still picking up on whatever had assaulted her when she touched the marks in the gravel, or maybe the guy was a creep. Either way, she felt better once he got in his car and drove away.

Her fingers still buzzed even as the minutes passed. It didn't surprise her to pick up some kind of vibe. After all, she and Alida shared so much. What surprised her was how desolate she felt. She'd come out here with Katie hoping for a miracle. Instead she felt worse.

"Are you okay?"

Katie's concerned words broke into her dark thoughts.

A truthful answer would be big fat no. Instead, for no rational reason she could come up with, she lied. "I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

She let her gaze drift to Katie's face, surprised by the worry she saw there. She tried for a smile. "I'm discouraged."

"You hoped to be able to find her."

Stupid as it sounded, that was exactly right. "Yes, I did. I don't know why I thought just being here would produce some magic vision and I'd be able to do what you trained professionals couldn't."

Katie laid a hand on her shoulder, the warmth reassuring. "Nothing wrong with being hopeful."

"Unrealistic, you mean."

Katie shook her head. "No, I mean hopeful and helpful. Help breaking cases often comes in the most unexpected ways and places so don't ever sell yourself short."

Tears pricked at the back of her eyes and she blinked quickly, willing them away. “I really wanted to find her today.”

“We will find her.”

“Today?”

“Soon.” Katie’s voice was calm and steady, yet it did nothing to reassure Thea.

Suddenly, she needed to get away from here. A wave of something evil seemed to drape around her shoulders and try to cut off her breath. She whirled and headed back to Katie’s SUV. Without a word, she got in and buckled her seat belt.

“Can we just go back to town?” she asked when Katie was in the driver’s seat and buckled up too.

“Of course.” If Thea’s abrupt race for the car bothered her, Katie gave no indication.

For the first few miles she didn’t say anything, grateful Katie didn’t try to fill the silence. Staring out the side window, she finally said, “When we were about twelve, we did something we’d never done before. We went to different summer camps—Alida to Camp Reed up north and me to a week-long art workshop in Seattle.”

“It must have been scary.”

She smiled, remembering the excitement of being on her own for the first time in her young life. “You’d think so, wouldn’t you? But no, we were both thrilled to be able to do what excited us the most. Alida loved all the outdoor activities, and for me, the chance to spend a week with nothing but art was like nirvana.”

The memories of their excitement waned as the reality of that long-ago week settled. “Everything started off so wonderfully. On Wednesday, I woke up screaming and the counselor assigned to my group couldn’t get me to calm down. They had to call my parents, and that’s when they understood.”

“Something happened?”

She nodded, even though she knew Katie’s eyes were on the road. “Alida was always the adventurous one and would take risks. She and three other girls snuck out to go swimming in the dark. Long story short, she fell about twenty feet down an embankment, broke her arm in two places, and suffered a concussion. She was out for three days.”

“You felt it over in Seattle?”

“Yes. The pain hit me first while I was sound asleep. When I woke up fully I realized it wasn’t me, but I knew something was terribly wrong with Alida.”

“And that’s why you were so hopeful you could find her if you came out here with me today?”

“Yes.”

“You did feel something.”

“I did.”

“And you’re worried because it’s how you felt when you were twelve.”

It wasn’t a question, and Thea felt closer to Katie because clearly she understood. Thea sat looking out the side window as she murmured, “I was scared before we came out here. Now I’m terrified.”



He could see it now and soon so would she. The sighs and the tears of the lost one were carried on the wind as it moved across the mountains and the deserts between the East and the West. His heart ached for yet another who cried for help and yet none came. Only he heard her pleas, and he was powerless to ease her suffering.

She alone held the power to bring her home to the family who longed to see her face. Lies told and trust betrayed, yet at her core where only God could see, she was a good person who did not deserve the fate that had come down upon her. Now that he knew and understood, it was up to him to find a way to guide her east. She was destined to help that lost soul find her way home.

He closed his eyes and concentrated. Her world was not his to touch, yet still he had to find a way not just for the lost one, but for himself as well.

To the east, storm clouds were building, the sky starting to grow dark with the familiar signs. Here along the coastal waters of the far north, lightning sliced through the gloom and thunder growled like a hungry bear. Fear shot through his body as though that bolt of lightning had struck him. Somewhere in the distance, evil flexed its muscles. Its presence sent ripples flowing unseen through the universe.

Time was once again running short. With his eyes still closed and his hands clasped tightly together, he concentrated. That was all he could do, and he prayed it was enough.

Across the mountains, three hundred and fifty miles away, a newspaper rose from where it lay in a recycle bin. For a moment it hung suspended in the air, and then slowly it floated to the floor. Against the red-quarry tile floor, a black-and-white photograph stared up at the ceiling.



Lorna watched Renee walk across the massive yard and smiled. It still amazed her that someone so lovely and free-spirited would have any interest in her. She wasn't exactly what anyone would call a free spirit. Lorna liked structure, loved deadlines, and lived for challenges. If she didn't, she would never have made it as a person who successfully worked at home. Organization was the key to making a home-based career work, and she was the consummate pro.

Her career was both solid and financially sound because she was such a detail person. The quality had also put her on the path to competing in her first Ironman challenge. In three months, she would compete in the two-plus-mile swim, hundred-and-twelve-mile bike ride, and a full marathon, all in one day. The thought of what she was committed to doing often made her a little ill, and then she'd shake it off and keep training. She could hardly wait for June.

Renee, on the other hand, shook her head in disbelief every time Lorna talked with glowing anticipation of the endurance event. Like most everyone else around her, Renee thought she was crazy. Why would she want to put her body through something like that? It was hard to explain to people how empowering the race was. No, she wasn't crazy at all.

In reality she wanted to prove she could do it as much to herself as to those around her. While her family built her self-esteem, too many other people had told her she couldn't do something because she was a girl. She detested that particular line of crap. Drove her to fits of temper when she was a child, and as an adult, it hardened her resolve to do all the things people told her she couldn't. When she

crossed that finish line after logging in over 140 miles in a single day, she'd see how many people tried that bullshit on her again.

For now though, she'd completed her training for today—a three-hour bike ride followed by a half-an-hour run. A brick, it was called in the triathlon world, and for good reason. Her legs felt like bricks when she got off the bike and started to run. After only a few minutes, though, she found her running rhythm and the half an hour flew by. Now her legs were a little tired but in a good way. As she put her bike away, she was already looking forward to popping the cork on a nice bottle of wine, putting her feet up, and just hanging out with Renee. It was the perfect ending to a great workout.

The house was unusually quiet considering the size of the clan that called it home these days. Jeremy and Merry were gone for the rest of the week, having decided to take a quick run up to Canada while Merry's pregnancy was still in the early stages and she could get around easily enough. Jolene, Renee's mother and their cherished housekeeper, was in her own quarters, and they wouldn't see her again until morning. Lorna loved having everyone around, though there was something to be said for a little quiet time with the woman she loved.

Lorna set the opened wine bottle on the low table in front of the sofa, along with the two stemmed glasses she'd brought in. Into one she poured the golden liquid and breathed in the aroma. With her back to the cushions and her feet on the table—something she didn't dare let Jolene catch her doing—she sipped the wine. It tasted as good as it smelled.

Renee walked into the room and smiled. "That was lovely," she said as she draped a light sweater over the back of a chair. "I know it rains here a lot and the skies are so often black and blue, but today, it was simply gorgeous. That walk on the beach was like a month's worth of therapy, and it was free!"

Lorna smiled back at her. "I know exactly what you mean. When I came here I was worried that I'd hate the weather. I mean in Spokane you have four distinct seasons complete with plenty of sunshine. Each season is fun and interesting in its own way. I didn't grow up around the dampness and storms of the ocean. I tell you what, though. Now that I've experienced this part of the country, I wouldn't trade it for the world."

Renee walked over and kissed her. “I’m so glad your aunt gave you this place.”

If only she knew how glad Lorna was too, but she wasn’t about to say that quite yet. Renee was smart and surely aware how much Lorna desired her and how she set her body on fire. Still, the word love hadn’t actually passed her lips, nor would it anytime soon. It was that old once-bitten and all that. This time around, she was trudging along the slow and cautious road. Her heart could only take so much rejection, and if Renee turned her back on Lorna—well, she didn’t want to think about that. Besides, what was the hurry?

For now, things were wonderful between them. They fit together so well, despite their differences, or maybe because of them. What was so painful during her initial days here was like ancient fading memories today. In fact it amazed her how little she thought about Anna now. When she’d first moved into the house, Anna, Anna, Anna was all she could think about. Now, she was barely a flicker in Lorna’s thoughts.

Renee filled her thoughts both night and day, and in a way that made her heart light. She lit up the room whenever she walked in, and her spirited good nature was infectious. Lorna had never been around anyone quite like her. What wondrous things happened when a person least expected them.

“Wine?” Lorna asked as she kissed her back.

“You know it, sister.” Renee came around the sofa and settled in next to her. Like Lorna, she propped her feet up on the table. They might all be adults around here, but when Jolene wasn’t around to scold them, they tended to act like kids.

Lorna laughed, winked, and sat up to reach for the bottle. “Had a hunch you were going to say that. Two glasses, see.” She held up the second glass she’d brought along with her.

She was pouring from the bottle into Renee’s glass when her cell phone rang. Digging it out of her pocket with one hand, she put it to her ear, held it with her shoulder, and went back to pouring Renee’s wine. “Yeah,” she said a little breathlessly.

“Lorna?”

She abandoned pouring the wine and set the bottle and the glass on the table before taking hold of the phone once more. The voice

seemed familiar, even if she couldn't place it, and the undertones in her caller's single word made her nerves twitch. She didn't need to twitch. "Yeah, this is Lorna. Who's this?"

"Thea."

The voice clicked into place and her momentary unease faded away. "Thea! I thought you'd dropped off the face of the earth. What's up?" She was actually glad to her from her childhood friend.

"I'm so sorry I haven't called you just to say hi and now I'm calling because I need your help. I'm a horrible friend."

Lorna smiled, thinking of the lovely Thea. She'd been a friend to both Lorna and Anna. Like so many of their friends, not knowing what to do when they broke up, Thea had kept a distance between them. At first, Lorna was hurt by the friends who stopped calling and coming by. Slowly, as the pain of the breakup started to subside, she began to understand how it must be for them. How does a person pick a side when they like both people? The hurt she felt had faded, replaced by understanding and forgiveness.

"You're not anything of the kind. I understand, Thea. I really do. Now, what can I do for you? Do you need something written?" Obviously she was calling with a project. It would be fun to work with Thea's burgeoning business. They might not see each other that often, but it didn't mean she was out of touch. She was well aware of how well Thea was doing these days.

On the other end, shuffling and the rustle of paper was all she heard. For a long moment, Thea said nothing. "It's not that kind of help."

For a second, it didn't sink in. When it did, she couldn't help the way her jaw tightened. "Not that..." Oh, crap, not Thea too.

"I'm sorry, Lorna." Tears were evident in her voice. "If I felt there was a better option, trust me, I'd take it. But I need help, any kind of help. I need you. Alida needs you."

Lorna sighed and sank back into the cushions of the sofa. She ran a hand through her hair as the tightness in her jaw relaxed and she said, "Tell me."

Twenty minutes later, Lorna set her phone down and then laid her head on Renee's shoulder. If she could, she might just stay here all night. It would be nice to simply turn off her brain because she hated to think about what Thea had just shared with her.

Renee put an arm around her shoulders and squeezed. “I caught a bit of what that call was about, but fill me in on what’s going on with your friend.”

“It’s never going to go away.” She knew how petulant she sounded and wasn’t particularly proud of herself. Still, if just for ten seconds, she was going to feel sorry for herself.

“What isn’t going away?” Renee kissed her on the top of her head.

Lorna bolted up and waved her arms wide. “The *thing* I can do. The goddamn psychic thing. People are never, ever going to leave me alone.”

Renee nodded, her eyes gentle and full of understanding. “Oh, that thing.” She reached over and took Lorna’s hand, her touch soft. She brought it to her lips and kissed her palm before saying, “Tell me about the call.”

And she did. “So,” she asked when she finished. “Want to go to Long Lake over on the east side? Might as well get it done.”

A shadow crossed Renee’s face and her eyes narrowed. “Um, I can’t.”

Lorna twisted to get a better look at her. “You can’t? Why can’t you?” The tightness came back into her jaw.

Renee shook her head and bit her lip. She didn’t meet Lorna’s eyes. “I’ve been meaning to tell you that I have to be back in Seattle next week.”

Her heart began to beat like a snare drum. “Next week? You’re going back?” For weeks she’d tried not to think about what would happen when Renee returned to her own home. It was always there lingering in the background, and with dogged determination she always managed to avoid thinking about it. Stupid as it might seem, she opted to ignore it, hoping it would simply go away.

“Not permanently,” Renee hurried to say and finally met her eyes.

She almost cried with relief at the honest emotion reflected in her gaze. “Then...”

Renee smiled and squeezed her hand. “I have to spend some time with the contractors and insurance adjuster. They’re ready to really get rolling on the repairs, and I have to be there initially to

guide them during the walk-through. I figured Clancy and I would spend three or four days in the city, and then if it's okay with you, we will come back here."

Okay? Hell, it was more than okay. She tried not to let the relief show on her face. Instead she opted for a soft smile that she hoped didn't give away the depth of her emotions or, more specifically, the desperation. "Absolutely. You go take care of business, and I'll run across the mountains and see what I can do for Thea, if anything. All this press tends to make people believe I can do more than I can."

Renee took her face between her hands and kissed her hard on the lips. "And I think you underestimate yourself."

She wasn't so sure about that. What had happened with the two ghosts here at the house was a fluke. Right? Or was it? She felt different these days, and it was more than just changing where she lived and finding a woman who set her body on fire. Something deep inside her was different, and she questioned whether it would ever go away.

Could she help Thea? Probably not, but what would it hurt to try? Thea and Alida had been her friends all the way through school. They looked so much alike and yet were so completely different. She was never confused about who was who. They were such distinct individuals it was always easy for her to tell them apart even if they were wearing identical clothing. And then there was the secret she and Thea had confided to each other way back in junior high. A pinky-swear secret that still made her smile. Both of them had come to understand how different they were from most of their friends, but they also knew they had each other. Having such a good friend hold her secret helped her get through the difficult times. Now, it was her turn to pay it forward.

Whether she believed she could really do anything to help didn't matter. It was time to step up and help her old friend.

"Maybe," she said, kissing Renee back. "I'll at least try."

"That's my girl."

For a little while they sat together on the sofa talking and drinking wine. It was a beautiful, relaxing afternoon. She didn't want it to end.

Renee finally stood and stretched her arms high over her head. "All this wine has made me a little tired. I think I'll be outrageously lazy and take a nap."

“It’s early.”

Renee shrugged and smiled. “That’s what makes it outrageously lazy!” She leaned over and kissed Lorna. “You should give it a try, Miss Iron Athlete.”

“I’ll think about it,” she said as Renee left the room.

The second Renee was out of sight, Clancy jumped up and curled up next to Lorna. With Clancy’s head on her leg, Lorna absently stroked the soft fur between his ears and finished her wine. A thousand thoughts raced through her mind, and she discovered that part of her wanted to see if she could help find Alida. In fact it occurred to her she was anxious to get going. How did she move from reluctant to eager?

As the fire began to burn low she decided it required too much effort to stoke it. After her bike ride and run, she was worn out. Maybe Renee’s idea of a little nap wasn’t such a bad idea. She rubbed the sleeping dog’s ears one more time and smiled. It was so natural to share the sofa with the big black German shepherd. The thought of him not being here hurt her heart. It hadn’t been all that long, but he was part of this house, part of this family.

“Hey, you two, gonna stay out here all day? Seriously, girlfriend, I was going for subtle, but I guess I’ll have to get blunt. I’m not really that tired.”

Lorna’s smile grew, and a tingle of excitement raced through her. “Yeah, a nap might be just what I need.” She swung her legs over the sofa, disrupting Clancy. He jumped off the sofa and stalked out the door, the click, click, click of his nails sounding like gunfire as he made his way down the hallway and into Renee’s room. A lovely dog bed was in there, but she’d bet a fifty that he’d walk right past it to jump up on the empty queen-sized bed.

She got up and turned toward the door, then stopped. Her heart took a leap. Renee stood in the doorway, her long, thick hair down around her shoulders, her creamy robe open to reveal her beautiful naked body. Her smile was sly, sexy.

Renee held out her hand. “I took a shower, came into the bedroom, and realized I was all alone. I just hate being in that big bed by myself.”

For a moment Lorna didn’t move. “Can’t go to sleep?”

Renee’s smile grew and her eyes sparkled. “Not tired.”



It was pushing nine and she'd been here way too long. Katie needed to go home yet couldn't get herself up and out of the chair. After she dropped Thea off, she'd come back to the office and had been sitting here ever since.

Vince's little impromptu visit nagged her like a bad rash that wouldn't go away. Maybe it was just because he consistently got under her skin. Or maybe it was more than that. Why would he simply happen by where they were and stop? That transfer station was far enough away from the highway to make it not observable to the casual drive-by. So why was he making an obvious effort to follow her? More than likely to check up on her because she couldn't possibly do the job right without supervision. Constantly having to prove herself got real old.

"You ever go home, Carlisle?"

Her laugh held a definite cynical edge. "About as much as you do, Roberts." Chad Roberts was about her age, two inches shorter, and with blond hair so pale, in the right light he looked bald. Unlike Vince, Chad tended to fade into the background, and people rarely gave him a second glance. All in all it was a pretty good trick for a deputy, who sometimes needed to blend in to make the case. People felt comfortable around him, a regular guy who posed no threat.

She liked him and they worked well together. He was pleasant and didn't make waves. He also didn't think he was God's gift to women or seem to think she needed a babysitter on every case she worked. If Vince could be just a little more like Chad, he'd be a hell of a lot easier to work with.

"Why are you here so late?" Things were so quiet until he spoke up she didn't even realize anyone else was around.

He shrugged. "Caught a messy case out in the Valley. Some gal holed up in that motel right off I-90 and Argonne and shot her boyfriend."

"Well, at least it sounds pretty cut and dried." She wished her case were that easy.

He sat down in the chair behind his desk. "Sounds that way, but the scene isn't playing like that. There's more to this story than little Miss Muffet is telling us."

She got up from her chair, slipped on her jacket, and put her cell phone in her pocket. “There always is, Chad. There always is. But if anybody can get her to crack, it’s you.”

He ran a hand through his pale hair, which left a fair amount of it standing on end. “Thanks for the vote of confidence. Now tell that to the chief.”

“He giving you a hard time?”

“Naw. I just keep thinking one of these days he might actually give me a promotion or maybe even a little raise. I’ve done my time and proved myself, but neither seems to be working to my advantage.”

Katie laughed, thinking of their very budget-conscious chief. It would take a hell of a lot more than a few words from her to make him consider giving anyone around the department a raise. “You’re a dreamer, Roberts.”

His smile lit up his ordinary face. “Yeah, well, a boy can dream.”

She gave him a mock salute as she walked by. “Keep on doing it, my man.”

Outside, Katie stopped and took a deep breath of the clear, dry air. She hoped once out here she’d feel more settled, but it wasn’t happening. All day she’d been jittery and out of sorts. This wasn’t a major case. Hell, it might not be a case at all. For all she knew, Alida Canwell did, in fact, run off with a boyfriend and staged the scene to look like an abduction. That line of thought was reasonable, except she didn’t really believe it. Not at all. Something happened to Alida on that sunny afternoon. She could feel it in her bones, and it was bugging the shit out of her.

Figuring out where to start or who to start with would help a bunch. Taking Thea out there today might not have been the most standard police procedure or the wisest course of action, but she was struggling to find a pattern or connection that would help, and getting her twin sister’s impression couldn’t hurt. Unfortunately, going didn’t really dredge up anything concrete that helped get them closer to the truth. It turned out to be another well-intentioned exercise in futility.

The other thing bugging the crap out of her was Vince. No way, no how was his showing up out at the transfer station coincidental. Did it have something to do with the case or with her? He had a burr under his saddle about her and wouldn’t give it up.

When Vince came up against a woman who didn't want to get into his pants, he took it as a personal affront. He refused to believe Katie wasn't even slightly interested in him or that she might just be a lesbian. She could see the glint of a challenge in his eyes. He wanted to be the one who brought her to the other side. Dumb ass didn't realize it wasn't going to happen...ever.

That could be why he showed up out there. Keeping her in close proximity might be nothing more than his strategy for subtle seduction. Oh, he was a dumb ass all right, and she already had so many in her life, she didn't need another one.

But she would like a little more of Thea in her life. She was so beautiful and thoughtful and graceful. Katie just wanted to sigh and also wished they'd met under different circumstances. Thea was part of an on-going case, which meant hands off. What if, and this was a really far-off what if, Thea was actually involved in her sister's disappearance? It would do Katie's career no favors if she became more than a deputy to Thea. Something like that could very easily end her tenure with the sheriff's department, which she'd never allow to happen. She'd never disappoint her family with unbecoming behavior and never let herself down that way either. Sometimes she hated being her.

"Hey, Katie."

The sound of her name startled her and she whirled. Her hand to her chest, she said, "Jesus, Brandon, you just about gave me the big one."

"Sorry." He smiled. Tall and lean, the younger man leaned in the doorway to the IT Department, where he spent the majority of his time. He was, like Katie, a deputy sheriff, but he'd proved to be an invaluable asset when it came to all things relating to information technology.

"What are you doing here so late?"

"Helping you, of course." His blue eyes were fixed on her face, and not for the first time she had the sense he was trying to impress her.

"I don't understand." She hadn't asked him to do anything for her so it didn't make sense.

He held out several printed pages. "Background on your girl."

She shook her head. "I'm not following."

"You know, Alida Canwell. I did some background for you. Thought it might help."

She hesitantly reached out and took the papers. "Thanks."

His fingers brushed hers and his smile grew wider. "You bet. Let me know what else I can do."

"I'm headed out." She folded the pages and stuffed them into her pocket.

"See ya tomorrow." He turned and, whistling, disappeared into the IT room.

Blowing out a long, slow breath, she dug her keys out of her pants pocket and walked outside to her car. She touched the papers in her pocket, and it made her uneasy. It wasn't that she didn't appreciate Brandon performing his magic when investigating a case, but she hadn't asked him to and that bothered her.

It also wasn't the first time he'd popped up unexpectedly with helpful information. At least for her. As far as she could tell, she was the only beneficiary of his above-and-beyond efforts. She wanted to think the best of him and believe he just truly wanted to help. But that argument wasn't playing for her, and the alternatives she was left with sent dread creeping down her spine.