



Death in the Dunes

Linda Hope Lee

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DEATH IN THE DUNES

By

Linda Hope Lee

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CHAPTER ONE

The moment Dana Merrill stepped from her car onto Judge Robert Costain's gravel driveway, she sensed something was wrong. It was too quiet, even with the wind sighing in the tall pines and the ocean humming in the distance. The two-story frame house looked all closed up, which seemed odd on this warm day in early September.

Since the judge was expecting her, she rather thought she'd find him lounging on the redwood deck or digging in the small flower garden, leisurely passing the time until she arrived for her appointment.

Dana was a reporter for The Seattle Review, a weekly newspaper devoted to in-depth profiles and articles. She'd been assigned to write a story on the prominent judge, and had arranged to spend two weeks with him.

The first week was to be spent here at his oceanside vacation home. The second would be spent in Olympia, where the judge maintained an apartment and sat on Washington State's Superior Court.

Today was their first appointment. With a map drawn per the judge's directions and what she thought was plenty of time, Dana had set out from her rented condo in Ocean City. Unfortunately, she'd become temporarily lost and arrived late. Glancing at her watch, she saw that it was now fifteen minutes past the appointed two o'clock hour.

Well, she'd better see if the judge was home. Pushing aside her feelings of unease, she reached into the car for her briefcase and camera. She slung the briefcase over her shoulder and looped the camera around her neck. Then she climbed the stairs to the deck.

She knocked on the door and waited. When no one came to greet her, she tapped again and peered through the glass in the top half of the door. Inside was a kitchen with copper pans hanging on the wall and a butcher's block island in the center.

As the seconds ticked away and no one appeared, worry gnawed at Dana. Perhaps Judge Costain was a stickler for time, and when she had not arrived promptly at two he had considered today's interview canceled.

She hoped that was not the case. This was an important assignment, and she didn't want to begin on a wrong note.

Not ready to give up, Dana marched down the stairs and along the strip of lawn to the front of the house. There was a deck here, too, and one up above it, jutting out from the house's second story.

Dana climbed the steps and rang the doorbell. The chimes echoed from inside. Through the glass, she glimpsed a spacious living room with tan leather furniture, a sandstone fireplace, and circular stairs leading to the second floor.

But no one came to greet her.

Dana crossed the deck to yellow-cushioned chairs and a round, glass-top table. She perched on the edge of a chair, tapped her foot impatiently on the redwood deck as she considered what to do. Perhaps she should return to her condo at the Gray Gull and try to contact Judge Costain later this afternoon.

Again, she had the feeling that something about this situation was not right. She shrugged it off. Certainly there was a perfectly logical reason why the judge was not at home.

Dana's gaze lighted on a path leading through the dunes to the ocean. Even if she ended up returning to her condo, a walk on the beach first would be nice. As a city dweller, being at the ocean was a treat for Dana, and the beach drew her like a magnet.

Besides, if Judge Costain had somehow misunderstood the time of their appointment and had gone somewhere, he might be back when she returned from her stroll.

Dana took out a business card and on the back of it wrote a short note explaining that she had gone for a walk and soon would return. Then she stuck the card in the door.

She returned to her car and locked her briefcase inside. Past experience had taught her never to leave her belongings unattended, even in a place as isolated as the judge's.

She left her camera around her neck, intending to take some pictures of the surroundings. Soon she was walking along the narrow, winding path. After a few minutes, the ocean came into view.

Raising her camera to her eye, she took a couple shots of whitecaps glistening in the sun. Spying the top of the Cape Freedom lighthouse in the distance, she photographed it. Lighthouses fascinated Dana, and she hoped she'd have time to explore this one during her stay in Ocean City.

She took a picture of the judge's house, then of the pines and dune grass. She wasn't focusing on anything in particular. She only wanted something to refer to when she wrote about Judge Costain's oceanside retreat.

Deciding she had taken enough pictures, Dana walked on, eager to reach the water. A few steps later, as she glanced down, her gaze landed on something sticking out from behind a clump of dune grass.

It was a leg clad in gray sweatpants, the foot in a black tennis shoe. The ominous feeling that something was wrong here at Judge Costain's swiftly closed in on Dana like a black cloud. With trembling fingers she pushed aside the grass. Horror gripped her as she saw that her earlier instincts had been correct.

The leg belonged to a man. He lay on his stomach, his arms spread-eagled, his head turned to one side. Dana had no doubt that it was Judge Costain. She had seen enough pictures of him to recognize the thick, white hair, bushy eyebrows, and beaked nose. There were two, red-encrusted holes in his back. His open, staring eyes told her he was dead.

The sight was so unexpected that for a moment, Dana felt only numbness. Then, nausea quickly boiled up from her stomach. Dana clutched her middle, hoping she was not going to be sick. Stepping away, she took a couple of deep breaths.

Get a grip! she commanded herself. Go call for help.

Dana began to retrace her steps to the judge's house. As she hurried along, her camera bouncing against her chest, she glanced over her shoulder. What if the murderer was still around? What if he had seen her? Fear put wings on her feet and sent her flying.

When she reached the house, she ran to her car, hurriedly unlocked the door, and yanked it open. She dumped her cellular phone from her briefcase and quickly punched 9-1-1.

After she had made her report, she slumped onto the seat and rested her head against the steering wheel. Putting some distance between herself and the horror in the dunes calmed her. She began to think more objectively, the way a good journalist should think.

She took the camera from around her neck and stuffed it into her briefcase. Since there was a murderer on the loose, she closed and locked the car door. She stuck the key in the ignition, in case she needed to make a quick getaway.

Keeping an eye peeled out the window, she called James, her editor at The Seattle Review.

"Judge Costain murdered!" James exclaimed when she had him on the line. "And you found the body just now? That must have been awful. How are you doing?"

"Okay. But I can't imagine who would want to kill a man like Judge Costain. All my research on him indicated he had a sterling reputation."

"Yeah, but I'm sure a judge makes enemies," James said cynically.

"I suppose so," Dana replied. The thin wail of a siren echoed in the distance, growing louder as it approached. "Got to go. Help has arrived."

"Sure. Keep me posted. And, Dana, be careful!"

* * * * *

An hour later, Dana sat in Sheriff Dickerson's patrol car while he interviewed her. Earlier, she had led him, his two deputies, and the medics to where the judge lay. Shortly after that, the county coroner had arrived, then two more cars filled with an assortment of technicians carrying bags and boxes. The place had become a beehive of activity.

Sheriff Dickerson ran a hand through his curly gray hair. In his mid-fifties, he had the burly build and tough demeanor befitting a small town sheriff. "You say this is your first visit to the judge?" he asked her.

Dana nodded. "Our interview was for two o'clock."

While Dickerson wrote in his black notebook, she went on to explain how she had become lost and arrived late. How no one answered her knocks on the doors and her decision to walk the beach. "That's when I found him," she finished.

"How much time would you say elapsed between your arrival and discovering the body?"

"Fifteen, maybe twenty minutes."

While Dickerson noted that, Dana watched the medics return from the dunes. They went to their van and pulled out a stretcher and a large green body bag. So, it was time to bring the body out. Dana hugged her arms. She didn't like to think about that.

The sound of an approaching car diverted her attention. She turned her head to see an older model, tan car lurch to a stop in front of the yellow tape that now blocked the driveway. A woman with curly salt-and-pepper hair sat behind the wheel. As she cut the engine, a deputy went over and spoke to her. Then he approached the sheriff's car and leaned down to the window.

He looked too young to be a deputy, Dana thought. His smooth face showed no signs of a beard, and his blond hair stuck up in a boyish cowlick.

"Who is it, Rinaldi?" Dickerson asked.

"Says her name is Marta Lopez," Rinaldi said in a deep voice that didn't match his looks. "Says she's the judge's housekeeper. Brought some groceries out and was supposed to work today and this evening."

"Tell her I'll talk to her in a minute," Dickerson said. He turned back to Dana. "Can you think of anything else?"

"Not at the moment."

"Okay, you're free to go, but I want you to come down to the office sometime tomorrow and make a formal statement."

"I can do that." Dana didn't know what her long-range plans were, now that the judge was dead, but knew she could stay in Ocean City at least another day.

Dickerson opened the door and squeezed his ample stomach out from under the steering wheel. Dana alighted from her side just as a dusty black Porsche pulled up behind the housekeeper's car. Before it rolled to a stop, she glimpsed a California license plate.

Dana watched with interest as the door opened and a man stepped out. He was about six feet tall and in his early thirties. Hair as black and shiny as a newly polished shoe. A face with high cheekbones, a Roman nose, and a strong, square jaw. Skin a California tan.

The deputy and Sheriff Dickerson headed toward the newcomer. Curious, Dana trailed along behind them.

The man kicked aside the first of September's fallen leaves, came as far as the tape would allow, then planted his feet apart and asked, "What's going on here?"

"Who are you?" Dickerson countered.

"I'm Adam Costain. I'm here to see the judge."

Dickerson cocked his head at the man. "You related?"

"I'm his . . . son."

Dana noticed his curious hesitation over the word "son." From her research, she knew the judge had a son, and that the judge and his wife had divorced when the child was around six or seven. But that was all she knew about him.

Adam Costain didn't look much like his father. The judge's features had been craggy and coarse, while Adam's were more classically handsome. They both had the same square jaw and full lips, but the similarities ended there.

Dickerson took a step closer to Adam. "His son, eh? Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but your father's been shot."

Adam's eyes widened. "Shot?" he repeated dumbly. "Where is he?"

"Out in the dunes." Dickerson looked away a moment, then back at Adam. "The wounds were fatal."

Adam stared at the ground. "Oh God, I'm too late, then."

At that moment, the medics returned with the body. Adam looked up. Seeming to comprehend the meaning of the green bag, he said, "I want to see him."

"You don't have to," the sheriff said. "Doc'll make a positive ID."

"I want to see him," Adam insisted.

Adam stepped over the yellow tape. His glance skimmed over Dana and Marta Lopez, without seeming to see either. Then he headed toward the medics' van, where they were sliding the stretcher inside. Dickerson trotted after him.

Dana watched as the medics pulled back an edge of the green bag, and Adam looked at his father. She squeezed her eyes shut, feeling the pain she knew Adam must be feeling. But when she opened her eyes again, she was surprised to see that he looked rather expressionless. He stared at the body for a minute or so, then stepped back and let the medics cover it up again.

Dana considered what she should do now. Although she was free to leave, if she hung around, she might learn something of interest. Until she heard otherwise from James, she still had an article to write. After several years of working for small town newspapers, she had finally landed a job with the prestigious Review. This was her first feature article for James, and she wanted to make it good.

She sat in her car and wrote a few notes on what she'd observed so far. When she finished, she glanced around and saw that Adam Costain was sitting with Dickerson in his patrol car, as she had done while the sheriff questioned her.

Dana looked at her watch. Almost four o'clock. She might as well return to her condo, check in with James and find out what he wanted her to do.

She started the car's engine, made a U-turn, and drove to where yellow crime scene tape barricaded the drive. She stopped to wait while Deputy Rinaldi detached the tape from a tree, so that she could drive out.

"Hey, wait a minute!" someone called. Dana looked around to see Adam Costain's handsome face peering at her. She rolled down her window.

"Yes?"

"Don't go yet. I want to talk to you. The sheriff says you're the one who found the judge."

"That's right."

"I want to hear the details. Do you have some time right now?"

"Well . . . yes, but are you sure you want to go into it now? I mean, this must be pretty shocking for you."

Adam waved away her concern. "Now is as good a time as any. But not here. Do you know a quiet place where we could have coffee? I don't know the area."

Dana thought a moment, then said, "There's Beryl's in Ocean City, on the corner of Third and Main."

"That shouldn't be hard to find. I'll meet you there in half an hour. Dickerson should be through with me by then."

Dana nodded. "I'll be waiting."

The sound of a vehicle approaching made them both look around. A large white van rumbled up behind Adam's Porsche. KCLM-TV was scrawled in blue on the van's side.

"Here come the vultures," Adam said in a disgusted tone. "Sure didn't take them long, did it?"

Dana winced at "vultures." Didn't he know she was a member of the press, too? If so, it obviously didn't matter that he might be offending her.

A man carrying a camcorder and a woman with a tape recorder jumped out of the van. Adam ran over to them. "Get out of here!" he shouted. "This is private property."

Dana wasn't surprised when the two news people didn't even flinch. They were used to that kind of treatment. In her seven years as a reporter, Dana often had to deal with belligerent people. You didn't back down, you didn't argue. You were just persistent.

Deputy Rinaldi waved Dana through the driveway. Although she wanted to stay and see the outcome of Adam's battle with the press, she put the car in gear and stepped on the gas. She had no doubt that although Adam might rage all he wanted, the KCLMers would stick to the scene like leeches to a fat leg.

She wondered about his strong reaction, though. Did that mean he didn't like any of the press, ever? Or was he only protecting his privacy in this particular situation? Well, she'd find out soon enough.

CHAPTER TWO

Adam Costain gritted his teeth as he drove down the bumpy dirt road leading from the judge's house to Ocean City. Overhead, towering pines blotted out the sun, giving him the feeling he was in a dark green tunnel.

The judge's death was bad enough, without having to cope with the pushy media, too. Despite his telling them to leave, they'd hung around. One of the women reporters learned he was the judge's son. When Adam had finished talking to Dickerson and was heading toward his car, she and her camera-carrying associate ran after him. Adam had yelled, "No comment," but he might as well have been talking to a brick wall. She badgered him with questions. Furious, he lashed out at the camera, almost knocking it from the man's shoulder.

Adam had little regard for the press. His experiences had convinced him that they were headline hunters and privacy invaders.

It irked him to be meeting with reporter Dana Merrill. But he had no choice, if he wanted to hear firsthand her account of finding the judge's body. It was unfortunate that a reporter had been the one to make the discovery, but that couldn't be helped.

Why did he want to pursue the judge's murder? The man was dead, so what? Adam hadn't seen or spoken to him in over twenty-five years. Even now, knowing he would never speak to him again, Adam couldn't say he felt sorry. How could he feel sorry over the death of someone he had never really known?

He did have a few childhood memories of things they'd done together before his parents had divorced. There was a trip to the country fair, with the judge sitting next to him on the Ferris wheel. And he recalled learning to ride a two-wheeled bike while the judge steadied it for him. But, in later years, Adam's bitterness had all but blocked out those memories.

Yet he wanted to know what had happened to the judge out there in the dunes. It was his natural curiosity that lay behind this need, Adam told himself. Nothing more.

The bumpy road and towering trees finally gave way to the paved highway that led to Ocean City. Adam followed the straight ribbon of road, passing motels and resorts, antique and country stores.

The green and white Ocean City Limits sign appeared. Traffic slowed, then bunched up. Even though the summer season was officially over, the town still had enough visitors to keep it buzzing. There was one main street, with side roads leading in one direction to the ocean; and in the other, to residential areas.

At Third and Main, Adam quickly spotted Beryl's restaurant. It looked small and cozy, and like a good place to talk. Parking across the street, he jumped out of the car, intending to cross in mid-block rather than at the light. The traffic was heavy, though, and he had to wait for a break.

Between the passing cars, he glimpsed a woman with shoulder-length, reddish-brown hair sitting at the window of the restaurant. She looked like the reporter he was to meet. When she reached to push her hair back behind her ear, he saw her profile of high forehead, straight nose, rounded chin. Yes, it was indeed the reporter.

A break in traffic appeared. As Adam dashed across the street, his stomach tensed. He had a feeling this meeting was going to be a big mistake.

* * * * *

Dana looked up from her notebook to see Adam Costain come in the door. She'd been waiting for him for about twenty minutes. She watched him approach. He walked like someone who had a great deal of confidence in himself. His back was straight, his shoulders swung slightly from side to side as he wove his way among the tables.

Dana's heartbeat fluttered. She dismissed the tremor as nerves. Usually, she was more composed than this. Her discovery of the judge's body must have shaken her more than she realized. Then, too, Adam's apparent dislike of the press had her on edge.

Adam pulled out a chair and sank into it. "Hope I didn't keep you waiting too long."

That sounded polite enough, and Dana relaxed a notch. "Not at all. I'm sure you had a lot of things to take care of."

The waitress appeared, coffee carafe in hand. "What can I get you?" she asked Adam.

"Just coffee. Black."

They waited while the waitress filled Adam's cup. He dumped a spoonful of sugar into it, took a couple of sips, then said to Dana, "Now, tell me about finding the judge. The sheriff gave me his version, but I want to hear yours."

"Sure." Dana leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms over her chest. "As Sheriff Dickerson probably told you, I work for The Seattle Review. My editor sent me here to shadow the judge for a couple of weeks, to write an in-depth article on him. The first week was to be spent here at his vacation home, the second at Olympia, where he works and maintains a condo. But you probably know all about his living arrangements."

"I know the letter I recently received from him was postmarked Olympia," Adam said. "But why were you writing an article on him?"

"Because he'd just received the governor's Humanitarian Award, for all the charitable works he'd done. You didn't know?"

"I haven't seen or spoken to the judge in the past twenty-five years," Adam said. "He was a stranger to me."

How sad, Dana thought, and mused for a moment on her close relationship with her own father. What would she have done without Dad to cheer her on through the years?

"Go on with your story," Adam said.

Dana related how she had come to Ocean City, settled into her rented condo, then set out for the judge's beachside home. How, finding no one at home, she decided to take a walk on the beach.

"I'd almost reached the ocean when I . . ." Dana paused as visions of the judge's dead body brought a painful lump to her throat. "I almost tripped over him," she finally finished. "His leg was across the path."

"That must have been terrible for you." Adam's features softened, as though he really felt sorry for what she had gone through.

"It was," she admitted. "In all my seven years as a reporter, I've never discovered a dead body."

Dana related how she had phoned for help, then said, "I'm really sorry about your father. I can't imagine why anyone would want to murder him. He did so many good things for so many people."

"So you've said." Adam's flat expression told her he was ignoring her expression of sympathy.

She asked, "Since you've been so estranged from your father, why are you here? And at just this particular time? Do you live nearby?"

His face took on a shuttered look. "I don't want to discuss why I'm here," he said.

"You mean, you don't want to discuss with me why you're here."

"That's right."

"I don't think that's fair when I've given you a lot of information."

"Since when do you news hounds think about what's fair? You're just a bunch of headline hunters."

So, his negative feelings for the press did go farther than just this situation. Dana steeled herself to remain calm. "Maybe some are, but The Seattle Review is a different kind of paper. We're a weekly specializing in entertainment news and in-depth articles, not daily headlines."

Adam waved his hand. "It's all the same to me." He paused to drink his coffee, then said, "The only way I'd ever consider talking to you is off-the-record, and I'm not even sure I'd do that."

"What could convince you?"

He cocked his head to think. "Well, say you remembered something else later, something that might be helpful in finding the murderer. I might be willing to trade information. But it would still be off-the-record."

Although under pressure to make good on her new job, Dana hated to go along with his request. She wanted to be free to write about whatever they discussed. But perhaps she would be able to get Adam to change his mind at a later time.

Right now, he was her best source for the article. Despite his alienation from his father, he now would most likely have access to the judge's effects. Being on good terms with Adam might give her some access to them, too.

She said, "Okay, so I agree to off-the-record. Then why can't we trade information now? I've already given you some; now, it's your turn."

He arched an eyebrow. "Caught in my own trap, I see. You're clever. And persistent."

"Persistence is the name of the game."

"How well I know that," he said meaningfully.

She wanted to ask why he was so down on the press but sensed now was not the time. Now, there was another, more important issue to settle. "Well?" she said.

Adam looked away. His forehead wrinkled as he seemed to sink deep in thought. The seconds passed. Dana's nerve endings tingled. Would he go for it?

Finally, he turned back to her. "Okay, I guess I owe you a few answers. But no notebooks and no tape recorders." He paused and narrowed his eyes in skepticism.

"Right. You can trust me on that."

He gave a dry laugh. "I'm not sure that word is in my vocabulary. But I'm getting restless. Why don't we continue this discussion on the beach?"

"Fine with me. I love to walk the beach."

As Adam signaled the waitress for their check, a niggling doubt formed a knot in Dana's stomach. Was she making a mistake by going along with his terms?

* * * * *

A few minutes later, Dana and Adam were headed toward the ocean, a two-block walk past more stores and a string of motels. At the edge of the beach, they passed a small corral with saddles hanging over the wooden slats. Inside the enclosure, a teenage boy tended several horses. A hand-made sign said "Horses For Rent."

"I see the beach isn't just for walking," Adam observed.

Dana nodded. "You can drive your car, too." She pointed to a couple of four-wheel-drive vehicles traveling near the shore where the sand was packed hard enough to support them.

"Would you rather have ridden?"

"No way," she said emphatically. "I'd much rather walk."

"Good; I would, too."

They stayed away from the vehicles and horses, trudging through the looser, drier sand. The breeze whipped Dana's hair around her face, and the faint mist rising from the breaking waves sprinkled her skin. Ahead of them, she glimpsed the tip of the lighthouse that marked Cape Freedom's northern boundary.

Dana glanced at Adam. His furrowed brow suggested he was wishing he hadn't agreed to this exchange of information. Well, she'd better get it over with; his mood probably wasn't going to improve.

She said, "You were going to tell me how you came to be here so soon after your father's death, when you've been estranged from him for so many years."

Adam stopped to pick up a large clam shell before he replied. "I got a letter from him a couple of weeks ago," he said, tossing the shell from hand to hand. "He wanted me to come to Ocean City and see him."

"What about?"

"The letter didn't say. At first, I ignored his request. What did we have to say to one another after all the years of silence? Then I changed my mind and decided to come. I drove up from my home in Sacramento, and arrived here this morning. I checked into a motel south of town."

"Were you supposed to see him today?" Dana thought that unlikely, when she herself had had an appointment with the judge.

"No, tomorrow. But I was too impatient to wait. I was here, so I thought I'd drive out and see if he was home. . . ."

Adam's voice cracked as it trailed off. It was the closest he'd come to showing any emotion over his father's death.

She said, "Do you suppose he wanted to make amends for all the years of separation?"

He shrugged and tossed the clam shell out to sea where a breaking wave gobbled it up. "I have no idea."

"What about your mother?" When she saw that he was frowning at her, she added, "Oh, oh, am I out of questions already?"

Adam waved a hand. "Okay, I'll tell you a little about her. She was an actress. She died a few years ago when a piece of stage scenery fell and crushed her."

"How tragic," Dana said.

"It was." Adam shoved his hands in his slacks' pockets and stared at the sand.

"I take it you were raised by your mother?"

"More or less. My parents were divorced when I was six. My mother played in Hollywood movies, until, for some reason which I never understood, parts weren't offered to her anymore. She had family in Italy, so we went there. She was able to get some roles in their movies. Sometimes, I went on location with her. Other times, I stayed with relatives."

"How did you wind up back in the States?"

"After high school, I wanted to go to college and become an architect, so I returned and enrolled in UCLA."

"Really? That's where your father went. I remember that from my research."

"Yes, I went there because he wanted me to, and he was paying for it."

"He paid for your education, yet you never saw him?"

"That's right. He didn't even come to my graduation. I went on to graduate school, but on my own. I didn't want to take any more money from him."

"You never even so much as talked to him on the phone?"

"No."

"What a shame."

"Maybe, or maybe not," he said.

Silence reigned for a few moments, then Adam continued, "But, like I told you, even though we were alienated, I want to know what happened to the judge. I've decided to look into his murder on my own. Maybe I can discover something that will help the sheriff."

His statement gave Dana an idea. "I'd be glad to help you," she said. "If I'll be staying here, that is. I won't know till I talk to my editor again. But I had two weeks for this assignment, and as far as I know, there's nothing back in Seattle that I need to be doing."

"It wouldn't be a good idea for us to get involved," Adam said. "We've both fulfilled our part of today's agreement. I don't see any point in going on."

A cold lump of disappointment settled in Dana's stomach. "You're right," she said aloud, trying to sound as though she didn't really care. "But I hope we won't be working at cross purposes."

"I'll make sure we don't," he said. "And I think I've answered enough of your questions. We'd better head back."

* * * * *

Dana finished the sentence she was typing on her laptop computer, then looked at her wristwatch. Almost ten p.m. She'd spent the better part of the evening transferring her hand-written notes for the Judge Costain article to her computer. She'd tried not to think about Adam Costain and the fact that she was not going to have any more association with him.

So let him go off on his own. She could, too. And she'd bet she would have more luck than he did. After all, she was a reporter; she knew how to ferret out information.

When she'd first returned to the condo, she'd called her editor, James. He told her to stay on the assignment for the two weeks she'd been given, to find out what she could, and in the end to write something about Judge Costain. It was up to her to figure out what that would be.

"You came to The Review with high recommendations," he said. "Don't let me down."

"I'll do my best," she assured him.

Now, Dana decided to call it a day. And what a day it had been. She'd discovered the judge's dead body, been questioned by the sheriff, and met and tangled with Adam Costain. She shut down her laptop, then spent a few minutes straightening the papers on the dining room table desk.

Her gaze fell on her camera. The memory of taking pictures at the judge's place, just before discovering his body, popped into her mind. Pictures of the scenery she thought might be useful for her article.

She'd forgotten all about the pictures when she talked to the sheriff, so he didn't know about them. Neither did Adam Costain. It wasn't like her to forget something like that. The omission proved how shook up she was about finding the body.

She removed the spent film from the camera. Leaving the camera lying on the table, she thoughtfully fingered the roll of film. Although she'd seen nothing unusual in her viewfinder as she snapped the shots, there was a chance she might have photographed something she was unaware of. Something to do with the judge's murder, maybe. Some clue, maybe something lying in the bushes, or on the ground.

She would have the film developed first thing tomorrow, she decided as she tucked it away in her purse.

Before retiring for the night, she stepped to the balcony doors and looked out. From her third floor vantage point, she could see over the grassy dunes to the ocean. The water looked pewter under the night sky. The soothing sound of waves breaking on the shore penetrated her closed door and windows. Down below, in the condo courtyard, several people lounged in the steaming hot tub. Their voices mingled with the sound of the surf.

Turning away from the window, Dana let her gaze roam over the condo. The living room had stylish furniture upholstered in warm reds and yellows. A fireplace took up one corner near the balcony doors. The dining alcove, where she'd set up her office, featured a maple dining set and dish cabinet. The compact kitchen had every modern convenience. A short hall led to the single bedroom. The condo was a comfortable, cozy place to stay.

What a great place this would be for a romantic rendezvous, Dana thought..

Unfortunately, that wasn't her situation right now. After a couple of relationships that ended unhappily, she had more or less given up her search for Mr. Right. She put all her energy into her work instead.

Sometimes a little voice nagged her that she might be placing too much emphasis on her career; but whenever she saw her words in print, and someone praised her writing, she knew her work was the only thing that really mattered.

Yet, with a sigh that was heavy and full of something like regret, Dana cast a last glance around and went to bed.

* * * * *

Sometime in the night, a noise awakened Dana. She raised her head and blinked her eyes. It took her a moment to realize that she was not in her apartment in Seattle, but a hundred miles away in an Ocean City condo. She listened hard, but heard nothing. Perhaps it had been only part of a dream, although she couldn't remember dreaming.

Just as she laid her head back down, the noise sounded again. It was a dull sound, like a chair being dragged across the floor. It came from her living room. Was someone out there? Her heartbeat began to quicken.

What to do now? Lie here and wait to see if someone came in the bedroom, or get up and investigate? She decided she'd have to get up; she couldn't just lie here like a sitting duck in a shooting gallery.

She groped around her bedside table until her fingers found the small personal alarm lying there. Ever since a motel room she stayed in was broken into while she slept, she always kept the alarm close by at night. Gripping it in her palm, she inched out of bed and crept to the doorway leading to the hall.

Now, she didn't hear anything. Had the strange sounds been only her imagination, after all?

Holding her breath, she edged into the doorway and peeked around the wall. She hadn't closed the balcony curtains, and moonlight streamed through the glass.

She saw that one side of the balcony doors stood partly open. That must have been the noise she heard. Something moving in the dining alcove caught her eye. She looked in that direction, then gasped in horror. A person dressed in dark clothing and wearing a ski mask hovered over the table.

CHAPTER THREE

In his bed at the Sands Motel, Adam turned from his stomach onto his back and pillowed his arms under his head. He'd been dozing on and off since turning in at eleven. His mind just wouldn't shut down and let him sleep for more than half an hour at a time.

The coming days loomed like a big, ugly mountain. It wasn't just trying to discover what had happened to the judge. As the judge's sole survivor, he also had to deal with the remains of the man's life.

He must go through his personal effects; his clothing, his papers, the little, trivial things he needed for day-to-day living. Could he do it? For someone he had hated? Adam's stomach tied itself in a knot.

He told himself to relax. He shouldn't worry about such things now. Yet, he continued to stew. With an impatient sigh, he sat up and looked at the bedside clock. It was 2:10. Several more hours till daylight.

He had the sudden urge to reread the letter he'd received from the judge a couple of weeks ago. Throwing back the covers, he got out of bed. A light breeze from the open window swept over his bare chest and legs.

Not bothering to put anything on over his shorts, he padded to the octagonal table where his briefcase lay, and switched on the overhead droplight. He opened the case and pulled the letter from a side pocket.

Slipping the single sheet from its envelope, he unfolded it and held it under the light. The judge's bold handwriting beamed up at him.

Dear Adam,

I know this will seem strange when we haven't communicated for so many years, but I want you to come to my vacation home in Ocean City. I'll be there from September 3rd to the 10th, and I'd like to see you on the 5th.

Robert Costain

He'd included directions and signed his name instead of "Father," or "Dad." Apparently, he didn't think of himself as Adam's father any more than Adam did. It had been years since Adam had thought of him in terms of "Father." He had become simply, "the judge." It was too painful to say the word "Father" when, except for a few early years, Robert Costain hadn't been one to him.

Adam wasn't sure why he'd decided to honor the judge's request that they meet. Curiosity, maybe. Or maybe some other, deeply buried reason. Whatever, he had come to Ocean City. But all he'd seen of the judge was that one peek at him in the body bag. That was all he'd see of him, ever.

He wished now that he hadn't made the trip. Then he would have heard the news of the judge's death while at his home in Sacramento. He could've maintained his distance and handled what needed to be done from there.

He could leave Ocean City now, he thought, as he folded the letter and returned it to the briefcase. He didn't have to get involved here. He could turn the matter over to a lawyer, have him take care of what needed to be done.

Why shouldn't he walk away and not look back? After all, the judge had walked away from him when he was six years old. Why shouldn't he turn his back on the judge now?

What could he do about finding the murderer, anyway? He was no investigator. He was kidding

himself if he thought he could turn up anything the sheriff and his men couldn't.

However, it would look pretty stupid, not to say suspicious, if he left now, even though he could prove he'd been here at the motel at the time Dickerson said the judge had been murdered.

And, he was curious to know why the judge had sent for him. There might be some clue among his things that would answer that question. If Adam left now and turned the matter over to someone else, he might never know why he had been summoned to Ocean City.

He stepped to the window, parted the drapes, and looked out. The motel's yellow neon sign cast a glow over a corner of the parking lot. His thoughts turned to Dana Merrill and her offer to help him in his investigation. She'd seemed sincere about it, and sincere, too, in offering her condolences.

But that was just an act. She had a story to write and she'd go to any lengths to write it. Never mind all that b.s. about how The Seattle Review printed in-depth articles. Yeah, right. Newspaper and TV reporters were basically all the same. If there was dirt to be dug up, they'd dig it, and they'd print it or air it. And some of them, if they couldn't find the dirt, would manufacture it on their own.

He went back to bed, still thinking about Dana. He saw them walking together on the beach. The top of her head had come to a few inches above his shoulder. Her figure in jeans and a windbreaker looked trim, and her legs were long enough to match his stride. The ocean breeze blew her reddish hair back from her face, baring her high forehead. He remembered her tiny, silver star earrings on her delicate, pink earlobes. He could even recall the perfume she wore, a subtle, pleasant scent.

Hey, cut it out, he told himself. He wasn't interested in her as a reporter, and he sure wasn't interested in her as a woman. Ever since the fiasco a year ago with Michelle, he'd sworn off women.

He'd been so crazy about Michelle that he'd asked her to marry him. She'd said yes. Everything had appeared to be fine, and they were ready to set the date for their wedding. Then one day, he'd found her and his best friend, Rex, in bed together. After that, it had been hard to trust.

Trust.

Dana Merrill had told him he could trust her. But he wasn't about to fall for that trick. However, since Ocean City was a small town, they'd probably be running into one another. Well, so be it. That didn't mean he had to associate with her.

* * * * *

Dana stared at the shadowy shape for an instant longer, to make sure it really was a person, then jerked the cord on her alarm. It may have been small, but it packed a wallop of a siren. An ear-splitting blast filled the apartment.

The crouched figure whirled around to face the hallway. Something he had been holding clattered to the floor. Although she couldn't see his eyes in the mask's slits, she knew they were focused on her. She could feel hot waves of evil emanating from him. For a moment, she thought he was going to come after her. Dana's heart thudded as she readied herself to dash for the front door.

Instead, he turned and slithered out the balcony door. He vaulted over the iron railing and disappeared. Afraid he might come back, Dana let her alarm continue to shrill.

Someone pounded on her front door. She ran to it and looked through the peephole. It was Jake Bingham, the Gray Gull's owner.

She shut off the alarm and opened the door. Jake wore pajamas and a bathrobe. His sparse gray hair stood on end, and his eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses were full of concern. "What's going on?"

"Someone broke in."

"What?" He looked incredulous.

"Yes, just now, but he got away."

Footsteps pattered along the walkway and the heads of other residents peeked over Jake's shoulders. Dana opened the door wider to let him in.

"Stay back, folks," Jake cautioned the others. "I'll take care of this."

"We want to know what happened," someone complained.

"I'll let you know as soon as I can," Jake assured them. He slipped inside and closed the door.

Dana led him into the living room and snapped on the overhead light. The balcony door was still open, the curtain waving in the breeze. "That's where he got in," she said, hugging her arms against the chilling memory of the man bending over her dining room table.

She saw her camera lying on the floor. "That must have been what I heard drop, just before he ran out," she said.

"We'd better call the sheriff," Jake said. "Oh, this is awful. What's it going to do to my business?"

* * * * *

Sometime later, for the second time in twenty-four hours, Dana found herself being questioned by a law officer. Deputy Grayson, who hadn't been at the judge's earlier, was an older, dark-haired man with a poker face and a bored attitude. Jake paced up and down the hallway while Grayson talked to Dana.

"Is anything missing?" he inquired, after he had asked her some preliminary questions and recorded her answers on his clipboard.

Dana surveyed the dining room table. There were her laptop, small printer, CD player, telephone, answering and fax machines. "No, everything is there."

"Looks like you surprised him before he could make off with something," Grayson said. "He started by picking up the camera, then you set off your alarm. He dropped the camera and beat it."

"So you think he was after my equipment?"

"You've got a lot of stuff here that could be fenced. What're you doing, setting up an office?"

"I'm a reporter for The Seattle Review."

He peered at her. "Oh, you're the one discovered Judge Costain's body. I heard about you."

"Yes."

"You think this could be related?"

"I have no idea," Dana said. "What do you think?"

"Doubtful. Looks like a random break-in to me. We've had some gang activity in town lately. Kids stealing stuff they can sell."

"Why would someone go to all the trouble to climb to a third floor unit when they could easier break into one on the first floor?"

Grayson shrugged. "Maybe the guy saw you carrying in all this equipment and targeted you for a robbery. Maybe he had an accomplice on the ground he was going to lower the stuff down to."

"I suppose that could have been the case," Dana conceded.

Jake stopped pacing and came to stand beside Dana and Grayson. "No one has ever been robbed at the

Gray Gull since me and Jenny bought the place a year ago," he said. "What will this do to our business?" He paused to look apologetically at Dana. "Don't get me wrong, I'm glad you're all right. But, geez, what a thing to have happen!"

Four hours later, Dana gave up trying to sleep. She went to the kitchen and fixed herself a cup of instant coffee and a piece of toast. She carried them into the dining alcove and sat at the end of the table she'd left clear for eating meals. Through a crack in the closed window curtains, she could see light from the sunrise spreading over the condo rooftop. The squawks of seagulls on the prow drifted in on the ocean's roar.

A bad case of nerves made it difficult for Dana to eat, and worry gnawed at her stomach almost as much as hunger. She hadn't been able to stop thinking about either the judge's murder or the break-in. Were the two related?

Deputy Grayson didn't think so. She had to admit that his reasons held weight. There had been other robberies in Ocean City, attributed to gangs. Perhaps her break-in fell into that category.

It was also entirely possible that someone, gang member or otherwise, had seen Dana carrying all her equipment into her condo when she'd moved in, and had targeted her for a hit.

However, the fact that the guy had grabbed the camera first suggested another scenario.

What if he was the judge's murderer and had seen her taking pictures of the crime scene? He was worried that she had photographed something that would lead the police to him. So, of course, he wanted the camera.

He'd somehow found out where she lived. He'd jimmied the lock on the balcony door and crept inside. She'd made it easy for him by leaving the camera on the table.

But the guy hadn't counted on Dana waking up. Or her having an alarm that would wake the dead. He'd been so startled, he'd dropped the camera and run.

Whose theory was correct, hers or Deputy Grayson's?

One way to find out was to have the pictures developed. If she had photographed something important, it might show up in the prints.

* * * * *

Later, when it was time for stores to start opening, Dana took the film and headed downtown to a mini-mall on Main Street, where she recalled seeing a one-hour photo shop.

"It doesn't have to be done in one hour," she told the man behind the photo shop counter. "But I would like to have them today."

"No problem," he said, looking at her through his round glasses. "I can do it while you wait. With most of the tourists gone, I'm not swamped for quick service."

He took her roll of film and began to fill out a form. Dana gazed idly at the colorful posters of flowers and children that decorated the walls. A black Labrador dog lay on the floor, so used to customers it didn't even raise its head to look at her.

"Did you know Judge Costain?" she asked when he had finished his paper work.

"Not personally. I knew he had a vacation home north of town, but I never saw him around. I heard what happened out there yesterday. Pretty scary. We haven't had a murder in Ocean City in several years."

"Do you know anyone in town who did know the judge?"

"Nope. He kept pretty much to himself while he was here. Why? You a friend of his?"

"I'm with The Seattle Review. I came here to write a profile on the judge."

His eyes lighted with understanding. "You're the one who found the body. I read about you in the Ocean City Gazette. Just came out this morning."

"You did? Do you have a copy?"

"Sure. It's right here . . . somewhere." He shuffled through a stack of papers on his desk. "Here it is." He held out a folded newspaper.

Dana grasped the paper. "Thanks. Okay if I take this next door to the coffee shop to read while I'm waiting for the pictures?"

"Sure. You don't even have to give it back to me."

In the coffee shop, Dana perched on a tall stool and ordered a latte and a piece of chocolate-frosted Biscotti. Sipping and munching, she unfolded the paper.

The article about the judge blazed from the front page. The byline said "Glenda Jordan." Dana read the story not only for content but also with her journalistic eye. It was a good piece of reporting, she decided, with a clear, easy-to-read style.

As the photo shop owner had said, the article mentioned that Dana Merrill, a reporter from The Seattle Review, had found the judge's body. Glenda Jordan must have obtained that information from the sheriff's report, as Dana obviously had not spoken to her.

Having half an hour more to kill, Dana skimmed the paper's inside pages. It brought back memories, because her first job after graduating from journalism school had been with a small town paper such as this. She'd started out doing the Police Beat and then had gone on to write feature stories. A small newspaper was a great place to cut one's journalistic teeth.

Her reminiscing was interrupted as her eye caught the words "Judge Robert Costain." The headline of the article containing the judge's name read, "Chamber of Commerce Meets."

Judge Costain, the article said, had been the speaker. His topic was "Justice in the 90s." The article gave a few quotes from his speech. Dana made a mental note to contact the head of the Chamber of Commerce, to find out what he or she knew about Judge Costain.

When the hour was up, Dana eagerly returned to the photo shop. The proprietor was emerging from his back room, a bunch of photos in hand.

"Good timing," he said.

"Could I see the pictures before you wrap them up?" she asked.

"Sure." He handed them to her.

Holding her breath in anticipation, Dana quickly flipped through the pictures. She saw nothing unusual, just shots of the ocean, the Cape Freedom lighthouse, the top of the judge's house peeking over the dunes.

Then something caught her eye. In the lower left-hand corner of one photo, behind a clump of grass, was a round shadow that looked like someone's head. The bit of blue underneath could be clothing.

Her heart thudding, Dana stepped to the window where the light was better. She stared at the picture, turning it this way and that. Yes, the round shadow was someone's head. And the blue was a shirt or a

blouse, or maybe a jacket, that the person was wearing.

Dana took a deep breath and blew it out. Could this be the murderer of Judge Robert Costain?

CHAPTER FOUR

The following morning, Dana sat at her dining room table, staring at the picture of the person hiding in the dunes. Actually, it was an enlargement she'd had the photo shop man make for her. It revealed blurry though unmistakable facial features--the tip of a nose, the faint outline of a mouth, the curve of a chin--removing any doubt that a person had been hiding in the dunes just before Dana made her awful discovery.

Was it the murderer? At this point, she had no idea. Neither did Sheriff Dickerson, to whom she had dutifully turned over a copy of both the original picture and this enlargement. He was grateful to have them, and seemed surprisingly understanding about her forgetting to mention taking the pictures when he'd first interviewed her.

While she was there, Dana had signed her formal statement. Then she and the sheriff had gone to the judge's, where she'd tried to find the spot where she'd been standing when she'd taken the revealing picture. While that had been difficult to do, as so many of the dunes looked alike, she had managed to pick out a place that appeared to be the one. The investigators who were on the scene had begun to search the area.

That evening, Dana attended the meeting Jake Bingham had called to explain to the condo guests what had happened to Dana. Jake told them that the sheriff's department was stepping up their patrolling of the area, and that he was having an additional security lock installed on each balcony door. He was also looking into surveillance cameras for the courtyard. The residents and rental guests responded favorably.

Dana spent the remainder of the evening working on her notes. The back of her mind mulled over the problem of whether or not to share her pictures with Adam, but by bedtime she had not come to any conclusion.

Now, this morning, she was faced with the same problem. On the one hand, she owed him nothing. Especially since he'd made it clear that he didn't want her help in his investigation.

On the other, he'd also said that if she uncovered new information, he'd consider talking to her off-the-record again.

Well, this was certainly new information.

Perhaps the strongest reason for sharing the picture was her assignment. She had an article to write. She doubted James would be very forgiving if she didn't do her best on this, her first big assignment for The Seattle Review. She owed it to him. More importantly, she owed it to herself.

Right now, Adam Costain was the best source she had, as he had access to everything that had belonged to the judge. They might be able to work a deal.

Dana was aware of something else pushing her in Adam's direction. He was hurting, whether he wanted to admit it or not, and she wanted to reach out to him. She knew that was a dangerous feeling for her to have. One of the first things she'd learned in journalism school was not to become personally involved with a source. Otherwise, objectivity was lost when it came time to write the story.

She finally decided at least to call him and offer to share the picture. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, as the saying went.

Aware that her heart was beating faster than usual, Dana dialed the judge's number. A couple of seconds later, Adam's brisk voice said, "Judge Robert Costain's residence. Adam Costain speaking."

"Hello, Adam, this is Dana Merrill."

"Dana." He sounded surprised, and, dare she hope, a little pleased, too? "So, what's up?"

"I have something you might be interested in--a picture of a person hiding in the dunes near where I found your father."

There was a moment of silence while he digested this information. Then he said, "A picture of someone hiding in the dunes? Where'd you get that?"

"Before I discovered your father's body, I took some pictures of the scenery, to use for my article."

"You didn't tell me that when we met," he said in an accusing tone.

"I was so shook up, I just plain forgot. I didn't tell the sheriff, either. It's not like me to do something stupid like that, but it happened. Anyway, when I had them developed, one showed someone hiding in the dunes. I gave a copy to Sheriff Dickerson, but I thought you'd like to see it, too."

"Yes, of course, I would. When?"

"Well . . . how about exchanging information, like we did the other day?"

Silence on the other end of the line. "You remember," Dana went on, "you said if I found something of interest, you'd talk to me."

"I remember," he said tersely. "And, it's not like me to do something stupid like that. But I did, and so I guess I'm bound to it. Come on out to the judge's place this afternoon, at three."

Dana made a thumbs-up sign with her free hand. "Thanks, Adam. See you then."

* * * * *

Dana arrived at Judge Costain's promptly at three. Two cars were parked in the driveway: Adam's black Porsche and a battered brown car that Dana recognized as Marta Lopez's. Dana was glad for the housekeeper's presence. It meant she wouldn't have to be alone with Adam. And, she might be able to glean some useful information from Marta.

She parked behind the brown car. As she got out, she looked up at the deck. Adam stood there, arms crossed over his chest, feet planted apart, as though he were waiting for her. The sight of his tall, sturdy figure, dressed in a plaid shirt, jeans, and work boots, made her heart beat faster and her throat feel as dry as the leaves scattered on the ground.

Stop that, she told herself firmly. Remember why you're here.

Carrying her briefcase, her purse slung over her shoulder, she climbed the steps to the deck and walked toward him.

"Hello, Dana," Adam said. "Come on in."

Adam led her into the large, airy kitchen. It looked as it had the day she'd peered through the window.

Marta Lopez stood at the sink, rinsing dishes, then placing them in the dishwasher. Her diminutive figure looked lost in baggy jeans and a gray sweatshirt. When she turned and looked at Dana, a flicker of recognition crossed her round face.

Adam said, "Marta, this is Dana Merrill."

"Yes, I remember you from the other day," Marta said with a slight Hispanic accent.

"You sure keep this place looking great," Dana said.

Marta nodded. "Thank you."

Dana turned to Adam, who leaned against the butcher's block island, arms crossed over his chest. His face wore an expectant look. At least it wasn't hostile, Dana told herself.

She said, "You probably want to see the picture first?"

"Yes."

Dana set her briefcase and purse on the round oak table. Unzipping the case, she took out both the original picture and the enlargement. She handed them to Adam. Holding them gingerly by the edges, he studied first one, then the other. "It's a person, all right." He looked up at Dana. "How long before you found the body would you say this was taken?"

"Five minutes at the most," she said.

"Hmmm." He studied them some more, then laid them on the table and turned in the housekeeper's direction. "Take a look at these pictures, Marta."

Marta wiped her hands on a dish towel and came over to the table. Rather than picking up the pictures, she squinted down at them.

"Dana took this just before she found the judge's body," Adam said. "Have you any idea who this person might be?"

Marta shook her head vigorously. "No, I have never seen this man before. Never." She turned away.

"Wait a minute, Marta," Adam said.

"Yes?"

Adam looked keenly at the woman. "You said 'man.' How do you know it's a man and not a woman? I certainly can't tell; too much of the person is hidden."

Sharp thinking, Adam, Dana thought.

Marta's eyes widened as she faced Adam. She shrugged her thin shoulders. "I--I don't know. I just guess it's a man. But I have never seen that person before. Never," she said insistently.

Adam regarded Marta thoughtfully, as though trying to decide whether or not she was telling the truth. Marta unflinchingly held his gaze.

Finally Adam said, "Okay, but if you ever do see someone who might be this person, you'll let me know immediately, won't you?"

"Sure. Sure, I will." Marta nodded emphatically.

While Marta resumed her work at the sink, Adam turned to Dana. "What did Sheriff Dickerson have to say about these?"

"He was glad to have them, and said he'd make sure everyone in the investigation saw them. We even came out here so I could find the spot where I took the picture."

"And did you find it?"

"I think so. The investigators who were here searched it for clues."

He looked thoughtfully at the pictures again. "I wonder if the person knows you took a picture of him--or her?"

"I don't know, but night before last someone broke into my condo. It might have been someone looking for the film."

Marta dropped a pan into the sink with a clatter. She turned around and regarded Dana with dismay.

"Oh, that's too bad."

Adam's eyes widened. "Someone broke in? Tell us about it." He gestured to one of the chairs at the round table.

They sat down, and Dana launched into an account of the intruder's visit. Marta went back to her work, but her head was cocked toward them, as she listened.

"You seem so calm about it," Adam said when Dana had finished

Dana gave a short laugh. "Maybe so, but at the time, my heart was pounding a mile a minute."

"Well, you managed to keep your head enough to scare him away."

Their eyes met, and she saw what looked like a sparkle of admiration in his. The unexpected response left her momentarily at a loss for words.

Finally, she said, "But maybe it wasn't someone after the film. Deputy Grayson suggested someone might have seen me carry my equipment into the condo, and targeted me for a robbery. He also said there've been some other robberies, that appear to be the work of gangs."

Marta looked around as she put a plate in the dishwasher. "That's right."

"What do you know about gangs, Marta?" Adam asked.

"Why, nothing much. I just hear about the robberies, that's all."

Dana continued, "So, at this point, we don't know if I was targeted at random, or because of my equipment, or by the person whose picture I took."

Several moments of silence passed, then Adam slid the pictures across the table toward Dana. "I really appreciate your bringing these out."

"These copies are for you," she said. "I had several made of each."

"Thanks," he said. Then, with the hint of a smile, "So, now it's my turn. What would you like to know?"

Dana looked around. "How about a tour of the house? Seeing where a person lives usually tells a lot about him."

"I guess we could do that." Adam got up.

Dana rose, too. Then she paused to slip her hand inside her briefcase and pull out her notebook and pencil. "Do you mind?" she asked when she saw that Adam was watching.

He shrugged. "If that will keep you accurate."

So, underneath all of today's civility, he was still hostile toward her profession. But what had she expected? That he would suddenly change his attitude?

Her first impulse was to defend herself with a caustic reply. But that would serve no good purpose. Instead, she clenched her teeth and forced a smile as she followed Adam into the living room.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the living room, Dana's eyes took in tan leather furniture, a sandstone fireplace, and a circular, wrought iron staircase. Half a dozen color photographs of local scenes hung on the walls: Ocean City's boardwalk, the dunes at sunset, shore birds pecking the sand, the Cape Freedom lighthouse.

"Nice pictures," she commented.

"The judge took them," Adam said. "I know, because he signed them. And I remember that when he was still with my mother and me, he was always taking pictures."

"That's something I didn't find out from my research." Dana made a note in her book.

Adam pointed to a hallway. "I'll show you his study."

Judge Costain's oak-paneled study had the expected desk, computer, printer, and file cabinets. The walls were covered with what looked like framed certificates. When Dana took a closer look, she saw that they were awards for the judge's volunteer work for various organizations.

"Wow," Dana said, busily writing in her notebook. "I knew he gave to a lot of causes, but this is overwhelming."

"I had no idea he was into so many charities, either," Adam said. "Somehow, I wouldn't have expected it."

Dana couldn't help but note the bitterness in Adam's voice. No, this was probably not what he would have expected from a man who was alienated from his own son.

She nodded at the computer and printer on the oak desk. "Have you had an opportunity to look at anything your father was working on?"

"I checked the hard drive. It's mostly correspondence with the various charities."

Adam pointed to a plastic box sitting on the desk. "These are audio tapes of speeches he gave." He opened the lid, lifted out a cassette tape, and read the label. 'Olympia Boys' Club, June fifteenth, nineteen ninety-eight.' And so on. You can listen to them, if you want." He raised one eyebrow questioningly.

"Yes, I'd like to do that, but it'll take some time to hear all of them." She looked around. "Isn't that a tape duplicating machine over there?" She pointed to a square machine sitting on a table. "I could make copies of them."

Adam waved his hand. "Don't bother. Take those with you. I don't want them."

Adam's offer surprised Dana. He was being much more cooperative than she would have thought. "Well, thanks. I'll make it a point to finish with them before either of us leaves town."

Dana set the box aside so she wouldn't forget it when she left. The tapes probably wouldn't yield anything of great importance, but they might provide some quotes for her article.

"Will there be a funeral for him?" she asked.

Adam shook his head. "Another thing I found today was his will. A note with it said he wanted to be cremated, with the ashes interred at an Olympia cemetery. It also said he didn't want any public services."

A brooding look crossed Adam's face. "That's just as well. I really didn't want to go through a funeral. It'll be difficult enough to have to dispose of all his things."

Dana couldn't help but feel sympathy as she thought about Adam having to cope with all the circumstances of his father's death. She said, "Are there any other relatives to help you?"

"None that I know of. He was an only child, and so was I."

"Maybe he had some friends in Olympia who could help."

"Marta told me about a man and a woman who visited him sometimes. But I have no idea who they are, other than that their first names are Burke and Leona. There's probably an address book, or something around here that will tell me their last names. I expect I'll find out eventually."

The mention of Marta prompted Dana to ask, "Do you think Marta was telling the truth when she said she'd never seen that person in the picture before?"

"I don't know. She certainly seems honest enough. I talked to her about her job with the judge. It all seems on the up and up. She answered an ad in the paper for a part-time housekeeper and cook. She has other people she works for as well."

"What about her family?"

"Her husband's been gone for about a year. She said she doesn't know where he is. Sounds like he just walked out on her. There's a married daughter who lives around here, and a son who attends junior college."

While Dana made some notes, Adam crossed to the window and looked out. "That person you took the picture of is a big lead. If it's not the murderer, it could be someone who saw the murder. There was some reason he hid."

"Yes, that's what I thought," Dana said.

Adam lapsed into silence, his brow furrowed as though he were deep in thought. Finally, he turned to Dana and said, "You said the other day you were willing to help me find out what happened to the judge. Okay, then, help me look for the person in the picture."

For a moment, Dana was speechless, then she said, "You also made it clear the other day that you didn't want my help."

"So, I've changed my mind."

"Why?"

"I just have. Do I have to give you a reason?"

"It would help me to give you an answer."

Adam cocked his head. "Well, you're the best witness to what happened that I know of."

"Mmm. And you're my best source."

"So, we take advantage of one another."

"I don't like the sound of that."

"Okay, we help one another. Is that better?"

"Maybe. But, what strings are attached? I suppose you'll want to approve of what goes into my article?"

Adam came to stand beside her. His sudden nearness took her off guard. She looked into his brown eyes, regarding her so intently, and found it suddenly difficult to breathe.

"Why don't we worry about that when the time comes?" he said.

Dana struggled to regain her composure. She swallowed hard, then said carefully, "I'm not sure I can put something so important to me on the back burner."

"Can't we just take it one step at a time? Do you always plan exactly what you're going to put in an article before you write it?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes not."

"So, wait and see what we discover, and then we'll worry about what you write. Maybe we won't turn up a thing, and all your worries will have been wasted."

His suggestion did provide a compromise. A risky one, but one that would allow them to work together. For a while anyway.

What about her attraction to him? No sense in trying to deny that, especially in light of the last few minutes. What if she got so personally involved she lost all perspective on her assignment?

Come on, she told herself, you're a seasoned professional. You've dealt with all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. You can keep your head in this one.

"Okay," she said, "it's a deal. We'll work together and see what happens."

"Great." Adam's smile actually looked as though it had some warmth behind it. "Stay for dinner and we'll discuss our strategy."

* * * * *

An hour later, Dana sat across from Adam at the round table in the kitchen. Their plates were heaped with Marta's delicious beef pie and crisp, tossed salad. Adam had dug into his meal with gusto, and they had been eating silently. Out the window, bright, golden rays of the late afternoon sun beamed through the tall pines. The back door stood half open, and the salt-laden breeze wafted through the room.

It should have been a relaxing, casual dinner. But it wasn't. Dana's niggling feeling that she was making a mistake by entering into a partnership with Adam Costain kept her nerves on edge. She feared that when it came time to write her article, he would want to approve it, and that would be something she couldn't accept. Although she kept telling herself not to worry about that now, she couldn't put the matter completely out of her mind.

Then there was the man's appeal. No matter how hard she tried, her attraction to him was impossible to ignore. She glanced covertly at him and for the first time, noticed his hands. They were sturdy and strong-looking, yet with the long fingers of an artist; or, in his case, an architect. She wondered what it would be like to feel those hands on her body. . . .

Adam raised his head and their eyes met. The trace of a smile swept across his lips. Dana flushed, embarrassed to be caught staring. She grabbed the napkin-covered breadbasket and held it out to him. "Would you like some more?"

"Sure." Holding her gaze, he took a piece of sourdough bread.

Dana cleared her throat. "You said we would discuss our strategy," she reminded him.

"That's right; I did." Adam finally looked away to spread butter on his bread. "Our main objective is to find the person you took the picture of, right?"

"Right," Dana said, relieved that they were getting down to business.

"He may be long gone by now, but he may be still hanging around, too. Let's look around the dunes and see if we can find any trace of him."

"Even though the sheriff's men already have looked?"

Adam shrugged. "They might have missed something. We can walk the beach, too. Maybe we'll find something there." Adam looked at his wristwatch. "We've still got a couple hours of daylight. Are you game to start tonight?"

Dana had nothing to do at her condo, except to add today's notes to her computer files. She could do that later tonight. "Sure," she said. "We might as well get started."

Marta came in as they were clearing the table. "Let me clean up," she told them.

"Okay," Adam agreed, setting his stack of dishes in the sink. "Dana and I are going for a walk. We'll be back in an hour or so."

Marta's brow wrinkled with concern. "Be careful," she warned.

"We will," Adam said. "And you, too. Lock the doors after we're gone. That guy might still be in the area. We'd all better be on the alert."

A few minutes later, Dana followed Adam along the narrow path that led through the dunes. The sinking sun glazed the brown grasses and scrubby beach pines with gold. The breeze was cool enough to make Dana glad she'd worn her jacket.

Dana kept her eyes out for the spot where she'd photographed the hidden person. It was easy to find because the investigators had tramped down the grass around it. She and Adam followed their tracks from the path to the most likely area where the person had crouched. They searched the brush, pushing aside the long, skinny blades of dune grass, and kicked up sand.

But they found nothing.

"I'll ask Dickerson if his men turned up anything," Dana said.

"Good idea," Adam replied.

They returned to the path and continued on. Soon they came to the place where Dana had discovered Judge Costain's body. The grass where he'd lain was still flattened. Some of the blades had dried blood on them. Dana shivered as she recalled the horror of seeing him lying there. Would she ever forget that awful sight?

She noticed Adam staring at the spot, but he continued on without comment.

They walked a quarter of a mile farther before the dune grass and beach pines gave way to the beach itself. To their left, the cape curved around to meet the Ocean City beach. To their right, the land angled sharply to the point where the Cape Freedom lighthouse sat.

"Could we walk to the lighthouse?" Dana said. "As long as we're just looking around, that's a place I'd like to see."

"Sure. To the lighthouse, it is."

They headed toward the shore, where the hard-packed sand made walking easier. They trudged along, past the crashing waves and swirling tide pools. A small flock of tiny birds landed near their feet. The birds pecked at the sand, and skittered off again.

This stretch of beach was much less used than that in front of Ocean City, Dana soon realized. There weren't many houses out here, and no motels or restaurants. One car, a horse and rider, and then two walkers came by. Dana carefully scrutinized each face, to see if it could belong to their mysterious person in the dunes, but no one looked familiar.

To reach the lighthouse, they had to leave the beach and follow a path that led inland and up a short cliff. As they prepared to climb the cliff, Adam reached out his hand to Dana. "Thanks," she said as she grasped it.

Adam began to climb, pulling Dana behind him. When they reached the top, he kept hold of her hand. Should she ease it away? she wondered. Or would that call undue attention to what was probably a meaningless gesture? She let her hand stay in his. She'd wondered what his touch would feel like. Although this was not the intimate caress she'd had in mind, the warmth of his fingers curled about hers was very pleasant indeed.

Two small cement buildings next to the lighthouse drew her attention. "What are those?" she asked.

"I'd guess they were used to store the fuel oil in the old days," Adam said.

"You're probably right. I don't know much about lighthouses, but I do know they're all automated now."

The wind was even brisker here than on the beach. They leaned into it as they approached the tower.

The lighthouse was built of cement, and painted a pastel yellow trimmed in bright red and blue. Dana craned her neck to look up at the huge, round light in the building's glass-walled dome. Since it wasn't yet dark, the light was off.

"I wonder if it's ever open to the public," she mused. "I'd like to see the view from the top."

"You don't have a problem with heights, then?" he asked, gazing at her.

"Well . . . I don't think so. But then, I've never been to the top of a lighthouse before."

They continued walking around to the other side of the tower where cement steps led to a large, heavy-looking door. Adam climbed the steps, fingered the knob, then came back to Dana. "Of course, it's locked, but I thought I'd try anyway. My guess is, the Coast Guard makes periodic visits to maintain the place."

"Maybe I could take a tour sometime when they're here."

"Why don't you give them a call and find out? I think it'd be interesting to see the inside of one, too."

"There's something romantic and mysterious about lighthouses," Dana said. "And the men and women who kept the lights burning so faithfully."

"Sounds like a dreary job to me," Adam said.

"I can see you have no romance in your soul," she teased.

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure about that," he drawled in a husky voice.

Dana could have kicked herself for mentioning romance. She didn't want him to think she was flirting with him. But a little voice inside told her that maybe that was exactly what she was doing.

What was the matter with her? Their walk on the beach was supposed to be a serious hunt for a possible murderer, and she was turning it into something like a date. She'd better get her mind back on their purpose for being here.

She said, "This looks like a good vantage point to look over the beach and the dunes. Maybe we'll see something of interest."

"Good idea."

Dana carefully scanned the area, aware that Adam was doing the same. "I don't see anything," she said after awhile.

"Me, neither," said Adam.

Directly to the east lay a woods with tall pine trees such as those surrounding the judge's house. Dana saw a road leading from the lighthouse property into it. "I wonder where that goes," she said.

"It winds around and eventually connects with the main road to Ocean City," Adam said. "Before I came here, I spent some time studying a map of the area."

"I wish I had," Dana said. "Then maybe I wouldn't have gotten lost on the way out to your father's. Maybe I--"

"Could've prevented what happened?" Adam guessed what she was going to say. "Probably not. Instead, you might've been hurt yourself. I'd say it was lucky you got lost."

Adam stared silently into the woods, then took her hand again. "C'mon, let's go look at the ocean side."

They walked around the lighthouse to the tip of land that jutted out to sea. The wind whipped up their hair and flattened their clothing to their bodies. Below, the sea crashed noisily against rocks that hugged the point. Spray shot through the air like liquid gold. Dana turned around and looked up at the tall structure. Maybe someday she'd write an article on lighthouses. She was about to share that thought with Adam, but caught herself in time.

He wouldn't be interested in what she wanted to write about, not even something as harmless as lighthouses. He hated reporters.

As her gaze lowered, she saw that Adam was looking at her with concern. "You're cold," he said, raising his voice to be heard above the roar of the surf. "Let's get out of the wind."

He led them to the backside of the lighthouse. The wind continued to swirl around them, picking up dry leaves from the woods and floating them through the air. Adam guided Dana so that her back was against the lighthouse wall. He stood in front of her, shielding her, leaning one arm against the building. She was all too conscious of his tall, broad-shouldered body hovering close.

"That wind is something else," she murmured.

"Umm hmm.

She looked up to find his face inches from hers. "Adam . . ."

"Shhh." He came closer, his eyelids lowering. Before she could protest, his lips had closed over hers.

Adam's kiss was gentle, as though he wasn't quite sure this was what he wanted to do. Dana's mind wanted her to resist, but her body demanded something else. The warmth of Adam's lips was quite a bit different from what she'd felt when they held hands. Kissing him had quickly started a fire in the pit of her belly. There was no way she could resist. Helplessly, she leaned into him and put her arms around his neck, her fingers tangling in his thick hair.

Adam took her response as a sign to deepen the kiss. His lips pressed harder into hers and his arms pulled her close. Dana felt herself being swept away, as if she'd been caught by the waves crashing below them. The roar of the waves and the roar of rising desire inside her became one and the same.

Don't be a fool, cautioned a little voice inside Dana. You must not get personally involved with Adam!

Dana ignored the voice and went on enjoying the kiss. The voice persisted, though, until it became a loud clamor and Dana's rational mind finally gained the upper hand.

Yet it took all her willpower to drop her arms and pull away from Adam.

"Ah, Dana," he murmured against her hair, still holding her close. "That was nice. You're nice."

"You're nice, too . . . I think," she said with a nervous laugh.

"Not sure yet, huh?" he joked.

"It's just that we still have our differences. Big differences."

"Forget them for now."

"I don't know if I can."

He said nothing, but caressed her hair, brushing curls back each time the wind caught them. Finally, he said, "We'd better get back. Marta will be wanting to go home, and I have to lock the place up."

"Y-yes, let's go."

Holding her hand again, Adam led them away from the lighthouse, back down the cliff and onto the beach. Dana trudged along beside him in silence. If someone had told her this morning that she'd soon find herself in Adam Costain's arms, she would have laughed at them. Yet it had just happened. Her lips still tingled from the pressure of his lips on hers.

She glanced at him. His brow was furrowed, his mouth set in a tight line. So, he was upset about it, too. He was probably giving himself a mental bawling out for becoming involved.

Disgusted with both herself and Adam, Dana tried to concentrate on searching for the person in the picture she had taken. She looked inland, where lingering twilight cast a rosy glow over the landscape. The tall dune grass and the tips of the scrub pines swayed under the brisk breeze.

As Dana continued to study the dunes, a bit of blue came into view. Her heart seemed to stop. Was someone moving through the sandy hillocks? She watched the bit of color disappear, then emerge again. Yes, it was a person. A person with long, black hair and wearing a blue shirt.

Just like the person in the picture.

CHAPTER SIX

Dana skidded to a stop. "Look, Adam, that might be our man." She pointed to the figure bobbing through the dunes.

Adam peered in that direction. "Where? Oh, I see him. Right. Let's go after him."

Adam grabbed her hand and pulled her toward a path leading into the dunes. Once into the thick foliage, the way was too narrow to go abreast. Adam let go of her and took the lead. Dana followed him as best she could, pushing through the heavy grasses and stubby fir trees. It was like being in a miniature forest, with the highest growth about a foot taller than she was.

The distance between them gradually increased, and Adam finally disappeared. She saw no sign of the man in blue. She hoped Adam was keeping him in sight.

Dana came to a fork in the path. Which way had Adam gone? She didn't want to call out to him, for fear of giving away their location to their quarry. Hearing noises to her left, she turned in that direction. Sharp pine needles from an overhanging tree dug into her cheek, and twice she stumbled over deep ruts. She came to another fork and again had to choose which one to take.

Finally, Dana stopped. She had no idea if she were still behind Adam or not. She listened for any sounds up ahead. Or anywhere, for that matter. But she heard only the soft whistling of the wind in the grasses and the dull roar of the ocean in the distance. The twilight had deepened from blue to gray. In another fifteen minutes it would be completely dark.

Dana suddenly felt very alone and vulnerable. Again, she had the urge to shout Adam's name, but knew that would be unwise. Whoever they were chasing could be lurking nearby, ready to pounce on her, now that Adam had disappeared.

However, she couldn't just stand there. She had to keep moving. She might as well return to the beach. Perhaps she would find Adam there.

Dana wheeled around and made her way back along the path. After a couple of minutes, she heard someone trotting along behind her. Her heartbeat leaped to her throat. The man in blue? Or Adam? Oh, she hoped it was Adam! Still, she'd better hide until she knew for sure. She ducked off the path and crouched in the grass. Holding her breath, she waited. What would she do if it was the man?

In the next moment, Adam burst into view. Thank goodness! Dana jumped up and stumbled back onto the path. "I've been worried about you!"

His arms went around her and he pulled her close. "I've been worried about you, too. That's why I gave up the chase and came back to make sure you were all right. I wanted to call to you, but was afraid I'd give our locations away."

Dana couldn't help but think how good it felt to be in his arms again. "I know; I didn't yell to you for the same reason. Sorry I couldn't keep up with you."

"It was my fault. I took off too fast. I didn't stop to think what would be best to do. I just wanted to catch the guy. It is a man. I saw his profile and he hasn't shaved for a few days."

"Do you have any idea what happened to him?"

"No, he just seemed to vanish into thin air. But c'mon, we'd better get back to the house. Marta will be wondering what happened to us."

A few minutes later, they were jogging along the sand. The moon had appeared, but only for a few

minutes. Clouds moved in, draping a curtain of darkness over the landscape. The water looked cold and ominous. Glancing behind her, Dana saw the sweeping beam of the lighthouse, but even that did little to dispel the gloom.

Finally, they reached the judge's house. Inside, Marta was storing her broom and dust mop in a hall closet.

"We think we saw the guy in the picture," Adam told her.

Marta's eyes rounded in surprise. "Really? Where?"

"Running through the dunes," Dana said. "At least, we think it was the same guy. He had long, dark hair, and wore a blue shirt."

Adam took off his jacket and tossed it onto a chair. "We chased him for a while, but lost him. He just seemed to vanish."

"That's too bad," Marta said. She took a blue cardigan sweater and a black purse from the closet. "I'm ready to go now."

"Be careful driving home, Marta," Adam warned, as he and Dana followed the housekeeper to the kitchen. "Lock your car doors. We don't know who this guy is or why he's hanging around."

"I will." Marta shrugged into her sweater and took car keys from her purse.

After Marta left, Adam said, "I'd better phone the sheriff and report our sighting. . . .I could use a cup of coffee, too. Would you mind making some?"

"Not at all."

While Adam made the call on the kitchen wall phone, Dana got a pot going in the coffee machine.

"Dickerson's sending someone out," he told Dana when he hung up.

When the coffee finished perking, they sat at the table to drink it. "I wonder why the guy is hanging around," Adam said. "If he knows you photographed him the other day, and he has something to do with the judge's death, you'd think he'd want to get as far away as possible."

"You'd think so. But maybe he's still around because he wants the film."

"Maybe," Adam mused. "Although he must know you've developed it by now."

"Maybe he wants the pictures, then. But, again, wouldn't he guess I'd turned them over to Dickerson?"

"Who knows."

Adam regarded her thoughtfully. "Suppose he followed you out here today? Then he followed us to the lighthouse. With me along he knew he couldn't do anything to you, but he was careless enough to get himself spotted."

"I don't like to think that someone might be stalking me," Dana said.

"Me, neither. Dana, you may be in danger. I don't suppose you have a gun?"

"No, but I've got some pretty wicked pepper spray. And my alarm." Adam's doubtful expression prompted her to add, "I hope you're not going to tell me you don't want my help anymore."

Adam took a deep breath before answering. "I'm torn," he admitted. "On the one hand, yes, I do. On the other, I'm concerned for your safety."

"I appreciate that, but please don't worry about me. I can take care of myself."

Several moments passed, the Adam said, "Dana . . . about what happened between us at the lighthouse."

..."

"It shouldn't have happened," she said quickly.

"I know, but it did. I hope you're not angry. I hope you didn't think that I--"

"It was just as much my fault as yours, Adam. Let's just forget it."

"That's what I was going to suggest," he said.

But Dana knew that would be impossible. For her, anyway.

They heard a car rumble into the driveway. Adam jumped up and looked out the window. "The sheriff's here."

Instead of Sheriff Dickerson, it was deputies Leaming and Rinaldi. After the two men took Adam and Dana's report, they went outside and checked around the house. "Don't see any signs of him around here," Rinaldi said when they were finished. "And it's too dark now to search the dunes. We'll take a look tomorrow."

When the deputies had left, Adam said to Dana, "C'mon, I'll follow you back to town."

"You don't have to. I'm sure I'll be all right."

"I'm going to follow you," he said firmly. "So don't argue. I'll give you a call tomorrow. We'll plan our next move."

"So we're still together in this?"

"As far as I'm concerned, we are. Even if I told you to back off because you might be in danger, you wouldn't, would you?"

"No."

"Well, then, you'll be better off if we stick together. Besides, like I told you earlier, you're the best witness to what happened to the judge."

"You're right," she said, "and you're my best source. We'd both better keep in mind why we've joined up."

"Don't worry, I won't forget," he said grimly.

* * * * *

Thirty minutes later, in the Gray Gull's parking lot, Adam peered through the windshield of his Porsche, waiting for more lights to blink on behind Dana's curtains. He had followed her into town, then accompanied her up the outside stairs to her door. Another light went on in what he guessed was the bedroom. He waited still another minute or two, then put the car in gear and wheeled out of the parking lot. Once on the main road, he headed for his motel on the southern outskirts of town.

Dana's image remained in his mind as he drove. This morning, he'd had no inkling he'd ever see her again, except maybe to run into her around town. Now, a few hours later, they were a team.

Well, he had no one to blame but himself. He'd made the choices that had led to their working together. She hadn't pushed herself on him, except to offer the picture.

As if joining forces hadn't been risky enough, then he'd kissed her at the lighthouse. That was really stupid. What had gotten into him?

He hadn't planned to kiss her, but she'd looked so irresistible he couldn't help himself. He had to admit he'd enjoyed it. He remembered all too well how soft and yielding she'd been in his arms, how warm

her lips were.

So what was this all about? he asked himself. Simple. He needed her. She would be useful to him in his investigation. As a reporter, she would have access to things--records, databases, whatever--that he wouldn't.

Besides, as he'd told her, she was the closest person to an actual witness to the crime. There was still a chance she would remember something else important. She'd come up with the picture, hadn't she? And that had led to tonight's chase through the dunes. Okay, they hadn't caught the guy, but at least they knew of his existence.

And she needed him. He was her best source; she'd told him that. He'd play fair. He'd give her some information to put in her article. But he'd be in control.

So, they both needed one another. It was a mutual thing. Just a case of impersonal need, nothing more.

He'd just have to make sure they didn't get more personally involved. That was a complication he didn't want.

He'd also come to another decision tonight. He was going to move into the judge's house. The guy in Dana's picture might want something of the judge's and break in. If he did, Adam wanted to be there, not just to protect the property, but to find out who the guy was and what he wanted.

When Adam reached the Sands Motel, he parked near the office instead of in front of his room. He wanted to check out and return to the judge's tonight. The bell on the office door jingled as Adam opened it and stepped inside. Jeff, the young night manager, stood by the coffee machine, making a fresh pot of coffee. A few doughnuts left over from this morning's complimentary Continental breakfast huddled together in a large cardboard box on the counter.

"I need to check out," Adam said. "I'll pay for tonight, of course."

"Okay, Mr. Costain." Jeff flipped on the coffee machine's switch, then moved to a computer and tapped the keyboard. A moment later, the printer spewed out a multi-copied form.

Jeff picked it up and handed it to Adam. "Sign here." He pointed to a bottom line. "I hope you enjoyed your stay--as much as you could under the circumstances."

"I did," Adam said, as he signed the paper.

Jeff tore off one of the copies and gave it to Adam. "Oh, by the way, someone was asking about you awhile ago."

"A reporter, I suppose."

The press continued to hound him. Unfortunately, they had found out where he was staying. He had turned away several reporters that morning before he'd gone to breakfast.

"No, I don't think so," Jeff said.

"Who, then?"

Jeff shrugged. "Some guy who didn't give his name."

"Hmmm. What did he look like?"

"I didn't see him too good. He didn't come in, just stood in the doorway, in the shadows. He was taller than average, I'd say, and probably in his forties. Couldn't see the color of his hair because he had on a baseball cap. Couldn't see his eyes, either, because of dark glasses."

"Did you see the car he was driving?"

"No, it must've been parked on the other side of the office. He waited while I rang your room. I rang it even though I knew you weren't there. I asked him if he wanted to leave a message, and he said no."

"What time was that?"

Jeff looked at the ceiling. "Oh, about five. Yeah, five. I remember I was watching the five o'clock news on TV."

"Probably some reporter," Adam said. "If he comes 'round again, tell him to leave his number, that you'll pass it on to me. I'll call you from time to time to see if there are any messages."

"Sure."

Adam left the office and drove to a parking space in front of his room. As he climbed from his car, the hairs on the back of his neck stiffened. He had the feeling he was being watched. He stopped and scanned the lot. No one was there. No one he could see anyway. The floodlights illuminating the lot did not reach into all the corners.

When he entered his room, he sensed immediately that someone had been there in his absence. He closed the door and let his gaze sweep the bed, the dresser, the TV, the two easy chairs and octagonal table.

The newspaper lying on the table looked different. He hurried over to it, pulled the string on the droplight hanging from the ceiling. The paper was spread open with some of the pages sticking out. He was sure he'd left it neatly folded.

In the wardrobe alcove, his suitcase lay open on the aluminum stand. The sleeves of several shirts draped over the sides of the case. In the bathroom, the contents of his shaving kit were scattered about the counter.

Adam began to pack up his belongings. Why had someone searched his room? He couldn't think of any reason that had to do with his work. None of the architectural plans he dealt with were classified, nor subject to industrial spying or intrigue.

It must have to do with the judge. Maybe the judge had had something that someone else wanted. Now, the person thought Adam possessed it. Trouble was, he had no idea what the thing could be.

Could the intruder have been the same person he and Dana chased through the dunes? He would have had plenty of time to get from here to there. Maybe it was the guy Jeff said was asking about him. Lots of questions and no answers, Adam thought as he carried his suitcases out to the car.

As he drove by the office, he wondered if he should tell Jeff of his suspicions. He decided to let the incident go. Nothing had been taken, and he didn't relish yet another meeting with the sheriff's deputies.

But from now on, he'd be on guard.

* * * * *

The following morning, while she waited for Adam to call, Dana phoned the Coast Guard for information about the Cape Freedom lighthouse. She found out that, as Adam had guessed, the Coast Guard made monthly maintenance visits to the lighthouse. And yes, they gave tours, but only during the summer season. Dana hung up, disappointed that she would not be able to see the inside of the lighthouse while she was here on this assignment.

She remembered another lead she wanted to follow up, the Chamber of Commerce speech the judge had made, that she'd read about in the Ocean City Gazette.

She was looking their number up in the phone book when Adam finally called. They exchanged

greetings, then he told her he'd moved to the judge's house. "I'm pretty sure someone searched my motel room yesterday while I was gone," he added.

"Really? Looking for my pictures, maybe?"

"Maybe. Or for something of the judge's that the intruder thought I might have. I want to sort through the judge's files today. Maybe we can find some clue. Come on out when you can."

"See you soon," Dana said.

* * * * *

When Dana arrived at the judge's, Deputies Rinaldi and Leaming were just leaving. Their search of the dunes had turned up a couple of footprints, but that was all. There was no guarantee that they belonged to the man Dana and Adam had chased.

After they left, Adam led Dana down the hall to the study. He pointed to a stack of manila files sitting on a work table. "I skimmed through those, but didn't see anything unusual," he told her. "Maybe your fresh eye will turn up something."

Dana sat down next to the files. "Okay. It sure would help, though, if we knew what we were looking for."

"I know, but that's a luxury we don't have right now."

Dana took her notebook and pen from her purse and laid them on the table. Even if she didn't discover anything related to the murder, she might find some interesting material for her article. She figured that if Adam had looked through the files first, there wasn't anything in them that he wouldn't want her to write about.

She spent the next couple of hours meticulously searching the contents of the folders, while Adam went through the desk and file cabinet. Most of what Dana perused had to do with charities the judge had been involved with. There was nothing she could relate to his murder.

She turned to the records that concerned his court cases. It was in one of these that Dana finally found something that got her mind working. She sat there for several minutes developing a scenario. Then, clutching the file, she went over to where Adam sat at his father's desk.

"Adam," she said excitedly, "I think I know what happened to your father!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Adam's dark eyes flashed with interest as he shut the desk drawer he'd been searching. "That sounds too good to be true. What did you find?"

Dana pulled up a chair beside his and sat down. She pointed to a paper inside the folder. "These are some notes on a trial your father presided over, The People Vs. Jurgen Manett. I remember this trial. It was about a year ago and it made big news here in Washington."

"Okay, but why do you think it has something to do with the judge's murder?"

Dana took a deep breath to swallow down her excitement. "I'll tell you in a minute. Let me start at the beginning. Manett had a long prison record before he came to your father's court, for crimes from burglary to assault to voluntary manslaughter. The trial your father presided over involved the brutal murder of a woman Manett was involved with. There was a lot of evidence that Manett was the killer, but, due to a technicality, your father ended up dismissing the case."

Adam folded his arms over his chest and leaned back in his chair, clearly involved in Dana's story. "No kidding? What kind of technicality?"

"The police found the victim's clothing in Manett's house, but because they didn't have a proper search warrant, your father had to disallow the evidence. Without the evidence, the prosecutor didn't have a case, so Manett was set free."

"I wonder how the judge felt about that."

"I imagine he was pretty upset. Your father was a tough judge. We know that by the sentences he handed down."

"Okay, go on. I'm waiting to hear the connection."

"About six months ago, Manett was murdered. I remember hearing about it at the time. Like the trial, it was big news. He was found shot in the back near his home, just like your father was. There were no suspects."

"You think there might be some connection between the two deaths?"

"Yes, that's my theory. Suppose someone connected to the woman Manett killed was so outraged when he was set free, that he--or she--assassinated Manett. Then the killer decided to get revenge on your father, too, blaming him for Manett's freedom."

"Even though the law made him do it?"

"He wants to send a message to the system."

"Vigilante justice." Adam rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I don't know, Dana, your idea is way out in left field, as far as I'm concerned."

"Okay, so it's a long shot," she conceded, disappointed at his lack of enthusiasm. "But if I'm right, then perhaps the guy in the blue shirt is the killer of both of them."

Adam picked up a silver letter opener and tapped it on the desk as he considered Dana's idea. "But why is he still hanging around? You'd think that after he killed the judge, he'd get out of here."

"That is a question I can't answer. But one thing we can do is tell Sheriff Dickerson my theory. If he thinks it has any merit, he can find out if the woman Manett allegedly murdered had any friends or relatives who might be capable of this kind of revenge."

Adam pointed to the phone. "Go for it."

Dana phoned the sheriff. Fortunately, he was in and she could relay her theory to him. "He's going to check it out," she told Adam when she had hung up.

While Adam went back to his search of the desk drawers, Dana rose and began to pace, deep in thought.

"What's going on in that head of yours now?" Adam asked.

"I'm trying to think of something more we can do on our own." She snapped her fingers. "I know. We'll find out if any other criminals who got off on technicalities have also turned up dead. If there are, we'll check on who the judges were."

A skeptical expression crossed Adam's face. "I think you're letting your imagination run away with you. Besides, how are you going to find out about the other criminals?"

"I'm not. But Renee can. She's our research assistant at the newspaper and a crackerjack at finding out stuff. I'll give her a call and get her working on it."

Dana sat back down in the chair and picked up the telephone. She dialed the number of The Seattle Review and soon had Renee on the line. She gave her the information and her request, then hung up. "Hope it works," she said to Adam.

"Hmmm," was all she heard from Adam.

Dana leaned back in her chair and stretched. Lifting her hair off her shoulders, she fanned her neck with one hand. It was suddenly warm in the room. Maybe it was time to take a break. She glanced at Adam, about to suggest they take five, then realized he'd been watching her. The intense expression on his face made her catch her breath. Their eyes met, and a shiver of excitement rippled down her spine.

Adam leaned forward and placed his hand over hers. Dana's skin tingled with awareness. "Dana," he said in a low, husky voice.

Dana stared dumbly at their joined hands, thinking she should pull away from him, but not having the strength to move. She lifted her gaze and dared a look at him. He was so close she could see the pulse throbbing in his throat, the faint line of beard on his jaw.

His face came nearer to hers; warm breath fanned over her cheek. She caught a whiff of his aftershave. In the next moment, his lips would touch hers. . . .

The phone shrilled. They jumped apart. Adam stared at it, then back at her. He made no move to pick it up.

"You'd better answer it, Adam," Dana managed to say.

"They can call back."

"If you don't, then I will. It might be Renee." She made a move to reach the receiver.

Adam issued a low growl, then his long arm beat hers to the phone. "Hello? Yes, this is Adam Costain, the judge's son. Leona Sims?" Adam raised his eyebrows at Dana.

Dana leaned back and blew out a shaky breath. She forced herself to switch gears, to forget for a moment that Adam had been about to kiss her. Someone named Leona Sims was calling. Could she be the Leona who Marta said had visited the judge?

"A memorial gathering?" Adam picked up the silver letter opener and tapped it lightly on the desk.

"That's nice of you. He didn't want any services, but an informal get-together of his friends and

associates sounds appropriate. At your place, tomorrow afternoon? At four? Yes, of course, I'll come."

Adam put down the letter opener, picked up a pencil and jotted something down on a piece of paper. "Is it okay if I bring a friend?" He smiled at Dana. "Great. See you tomorrow." He hung up.

"Guess you got the gist of that," he said to Dana.

Dana nodded. The spell between them had been broken. It had been a close call, but it was over now. She could relax.

"Leona Sims is a superior court judge, too," Adam went on. "She's probably the woman Marta told me visited here. We'll find out for sure at her gathering tomorrow afternoon."

"Where is it?"

He waved the paper he had written on. "At her apartment in Olympia. She said it's a couple hours drive from here."

"Are you sure you want me along? I mean, it is a private gathering."

His eyebrows raised. "What, going to miss an opportunity to get some info for your article?"

"Please, Adam. Give me a little credit for having some sensitivity, will you?"

Adam's eyes darkened with contrition. "I'm sorry, Dana. That was uncalled for. We've been getting along pretty well in our partnership, and it's stupid of me to spoil that."

We've been getting along too well, she thought, but didn't say it aloud. Maybe it would be a good idea to put some distance between them for a while. Dana was torn. Of course, she wanted to go to the memorial, but . . .

"But I want you to go with me," Adam was saying.

Dana let several seconds pass before she replied. "All right," she finally decided. "But someday you're going to have to tell me why you're so down on the media."

"I suppose that's only fair. Tell you what, have dinner with me tonight, and I will."

Dana glanced at her watch and was surprised to see that it was already four o'clock. "Is Marta coming out to cook?"

"No, not today. I thought we'd go to a restaurant. There's one near the motel I stayed in that caught my eye. It's above some shops and offices, and should have a great view of the ocean."

"That must be the Lightship Restaurant," she said, warming to the idea. "I've seen it, too, but I haven't been there."

A smile swept across his lips. "Good, we'll check it out together."

* * * * *

An hour later, Dana stood beside Adam as they waited for the elevator to the Lightship Restaurant. They had taken Dana's car to her condo, then driven in Adam's Porsche to the building housing the restaurant, where they spent some time browsing the shops on the first floor. Dana bought a paperweight of seashells embedded in glass, and Adam a Japanese glass ball that he said would be perfect for his balcony at home. Now they were hungry and ready to eat.

When they arrived at the restaurant, the hostess seated them at a window table. "You were right," Dana told Adam as she sank into her chair, "this place has a terrific view." She looked down at the ocean. From this height, it seemed to go on forever, in both directions.

When the waitress came, they ordered Chablis wine, an appetizer of steamed clams, and the steak and lobster entree.

Dana looked around at the lightship signal flags that decorated the restaurant. She also noticed a painting of the Cape Freedom lighthouse, which reminded her that she had called the Coast Guard that morning about visiting there. She told Adam what she had found out. "I'll have to come back next summer to fulfill my dream of climbing to the top of a lighthouse," she finished.

They made pleasant small talk as they sipped their wine and ate the clams. They might have been on an ordinary date, Dana thought, then smiled inwardly at her choice of words. There would be nothing ordinary about a date with Adam.

When the steak and lobster arrived, they quieted down to do some serious eating. After awhile, Adam said, "I promised to tell you why I'm so down on the press."

Dana sighed as she dipped a piece of lobster into melted butter. "I'm having such a nice time, I don't know if I want to hear something negative.

Adam nodded solemnly. "I know, but it's probably a good idea to get it out in the open, so there are no misunderstandings between us."

So I don't make the mistake of thinking your kiss meant anything, Dana said to herself.

He paused to butter his sourdough roll, then continued, "One reason has to do with my mother. Remember, I told you she was an actress? Well, to be honest, she wasn't a very good one. She played mostly in second-rate movies. But from the very beginning, newspaper critics panned her work."

"If she wasn't very good, perhaps their opinions were justified," Dana pointed out.

"No," Adam insisted. "If her confidence hadn't been destroyed by the bad reviews she read about herself, she would have been better."

"I'm not sure I agree with the logic of that," Dana said.

"I'm not asking you to," he said impatiently.

Oh oh, this was a bad subject, after all.

"Here's another reason," Adam said. "When I worked for a different company than the one I work for now, a reporter from The Sacramento Bee interviewed me regarding an industrial complex we were designing. She misquoted me in a way that made our builder associates look like crooks. I tried to make her print a retraction, but she wouldn't. I ended up losing my job."

"That was too bad," Dana said.

"You're telling me. Fortunately, the company I work for now believed my side of the story and hired me despite the bad publicity of the article."

"I know there are some lousy reporters in the profession. But that doesn't mean we're all disreputable."

Adam ignored her comment. "And look at the way the media has hounded me since the judge's death," he went on. "It may have been a reporter who searched my room, for all I know."

"I doubt that. But, Adam, they're just doing their job."

"Some job," he said scornfully.

The conversation was giving Dana a headache. She wished with all her heart they'd never begun it.

Still, Adam continued, "So, why should I ever trust any of you people again? It's like this: Suppose you went to the zoo and stuck your hand in a bear's cage and he bit you. The next time you go to the zoo,

would you stick your hand in the cage again? Only an idiot would do that." Adam looked defiantly at Dana.

Dana threw up her hands in exasperation. "I knew we shouldn't try to discuss this. Now you're angry, and I've got my defenses up."

"Well, you asked, and I wanted to accommodate you." He heaved a deep sigh. "Okay, we'll drop it."

"We could always agree to disagree," she suggested, hoping to end the subject.

"Fine, we disagree."

"Just one more thing, Adam," Dana said.

"What's that?"

"You must trust me at least a little bit, to let me in your life as much as you have."

"We need each other," he said tersely. "I thought you understood why we're together in this."

"Yes, I do, but . . . Oh, never mind!" Dana grabbed up her wine glass and took a healthy swallow.

After awhile, Adam said, "You were right, Dana; I wish we hadn't discussed my feelings toward the press."

"Me, too," she said softly.

"We need to get back on track," Adam said. "After dinner, let's walk the beach. Maybe we'll see our mystery man here in Ocean City."

Dana nodded. But to herself, she wondered how much permanent damage this conversation had done to a relationship that already hung by threads.

* * * * *

Surprisingly, once they began their beach walk, the tension between them eased. Maybe it was having their stomachs full, maybe it was being out in wide open spaces, with plenty of other people around. Whatever, Dana welcomed the relaxing change.

"I do wish we could see our mystery man again," Dana said after awhile. "But there are lots of long-haired guys around Ocean City."

"I know. It's like searching for a needle in a haystack."

"Did you get a good enough look at him last night to see any distinguishing features?"

Adam thought a moment. "He's a little darker complexioned than most Caucasians. But he could just have a good tan, too."

"There's the boardwalk," Dana pointed to the mile-long boardwalk built on stilts above the dune grass. "Why don't we walk it? We'll get a better view of the area."

"Good idea."

They climbed a ramp and stepped onto the cement walk. It was about twenty feet wide, with waist-high, wooden railings on either side. The elevation gave them a sweeping view of the beach and the dunes. Dana kept her eyes glued to the beach side, while Adam surveyed the dunes.

They came upon a mounted telescope that offered a five minute look for a quarter. "Let's take a look," Adam said. "Maybe we can spot the guy that way."

Adam pulled out a quarter and put it in the machine's slot. He bent to look through the eyepiece. "This

really brings things close," he said, turning the scope from side to side. "Here, take a turn." He stepped away and held the scope for Dana.

Dana leaned to peek through it. The grass in front of the boardwalk filled the eyepiece. She could even see a tiny bug on one of the blades. She aimed the scope higher and caught a flock of shore birds pecking the sand near the water's edge. As they dipped their heads, their white undersides came into view.

"You're right," she said. "I can see a lot of details." Positioning the scope to the North, she focused on the Cape Freedom lighthouse. "I can even see the lighthouse."

"You and lighthouses," Adam said teasingly. "Look at the people. Look for a guy with long dark hair and the beginnings of a beard."

He placed his hands on her shoulders and lightly massaged her muscles. A friendly touch? Or was there something more behind it? Since their almost-kiss today before Leona Sims's phone call interrupted them, he had kept his distance. A few times their fingers had brushed, but that was all.

Now this. Dana's heart beat faster and swallowing suddenly became difficult. Forcing herself to focus on her task, she aimed the scope at a group of people strolling along the beach.

Their man wasn't among them. She turned the machine this way and that, continuing to search. She noticed a dark-colored, four-wheel drive vehicle sitting off by itself, partially hidden behind a large, grassy dune. She wouldn't have given it a second glance, but one of the tinted windows was halfway rolled down, and a ray of sunlight glinted off something sticking out the window.

Dana's heart slammed against her ribs. It was a rifle--aimed straight at them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Get down!" Dana yelled to Adam. She grabbed his arm and pulled him down with her to the boardwalk's deck.

"What did you see?" Adam whispered in her ear.

"A rifle sticking out of a van window--aimed at us."

Dana was so sure they were the rifleman's target that she fully expected to hear the crack of gunfire. Fortunately, no one else was on this section of the boardwalk, so she did not have to worry about innocent bystanders being hurt.

"Are you sure? I'm going to look." Adam grasped the top of the railing, ready to pull himself up.

"No, Adam!"

"I'll use the scope as a shield." He slowly straightened enough to hunker behind the scope, as though he were looking through it.

Dana squeezed her eyes shut and gripped a wooden railing slat. She held her breath, waiting for the sound of shots.

Nothing happened.

"Do you see it?" she finally asked.

"No, you'll have to show me."

Cautiously, Dana raised her head and peeked over the railing in the direction she'd seen the van.

"It's gone!" she exclaimed.

Adam reached down to help her up. "Are you sure you saw what you thought you did?"

"Yes!"

In her mind's eye, Dana clearly saw the sunlight glinting off a long gun barrel. She shivered at the thought of what could have happened.

Adam's brow knit with doubt. "It'd be pretty nervy for someone to pick us off out in public like this."

"I know what I saw, Adam!"

He spread his hands. "Okay, okay. But it's gone now."

Still shaking, Dana brushed at the wrinkles in her slacks and jacket. "Let's get off the boardwalk. I feel like a sitting duck in a shooting gallery."

* * * * *

As they sped away from the boardwalk in Adam's Porsche, Dana leaned against the soft leather seat and tried to relax. Her hands had stopped shaking, but her insides hadn't. She kept turning around to look out the back window to see if they were being followed.

"See anything suspicious?" Adam asked.

"No, just the usual traffic. I don't think we're being followed."

"You're still sure of what you saw from the boardwalk?"

"Yes," she said emphatically. "Maybe it was the guy we're looking for. Like you suggested, he saw me

taking pictures and is afraid I'll be able to identify him."

"Or it could be someone after only me. Remember I told you that someone searched my motel room."

"Okay, then either one of us could have been the target tonight."

"Or both of us."

Adam pulled into the parking lot of the Gray Gull. He cut the engine and turned to her. The small interior of the sports car put them within inches of one another. His nearness set Dana's heart hammering against her rib cage.

"This is turning out to be a dangerous assignment for you, Dana."

"Maybe so, but it's not the first time an assignment has been risky."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Once, when I worked for another newspaper, I was assigned to write a story on Seattle's longshoremen's unions. They guys I talked to didn't like my line of questioning. They ganged up on me one day and the security patrol ended up rescuing me."

Dana realized too late that she'd left herself wide open to Adam's criticism. Why hadn't she kept her mouth shut about her work?

But his response surprised her. "I could tell you it served you right because you probably had no business being there in the first place. But you already know my feelings along that line."

"What I'm trying to say is, what happened to us tonight scared me, yes, but not enough to quit what we're doing."

He reached out and fingered the lapel of her jacket. His fingers grazed her skin, sent little tendrils of heat up her neck. Dana sucked in her breath.

"I hear you, Dana, but if I'm the one they're after, maybe you should stay away from me."

"Do you really want me to . . . stay away from you?"

Instead of replying, Adam turned away to look out the window. She gazed at his profile: the determined brow, the Roman nose, the firm chin. He was a strong-willed man. Once he made up his mind about something . . . Her heart thudded as she waited for his answer.

Finally, Adam looked at her again. His dark eyes in the moonlight shone like a cat's. "No, I don't want you to stay away," he said.

Dana barely had time to breathe a sigh of relief before his lips came down on hers. Still not feeling really secure with his answer, she let the kiss go on for a few moments, then gave in and wound her arms around his neck.

There was nothing tentative about Adam's kiss tonight, as there had been when his lips first touched hers at the lighthouse. This time, his mouth from the beginning moved masterfully over hers, as though claiming familiar territory. The gear housing between them prevented their bodies from meshing, but the heat radiating from him surrounded her like a warm embrace.

She took one hand away from his neck, ran her fingers lightly over his cheek and his chin, where a hint of beard tingled her skin. She traced a line down the strong column of his neck, and over his shirt lapel to his chest, where she let her hand rest. Underneath his shirt, she could feel the rapid beating of his heart. Her own was beating in unison with his, which gave her a warm feeling of connection to him.

At last, Adam drew away, but kept his arm stretched across the space between them to encircle her

shoulder. "I wasn't going to do that anymore," he said.

It took Dana a moment to catch her breath and return to reality. "Neither was I."

"We can't seem to help ourselves."

"Silly, isn't it?"

"Mmmm." Adam gazed thoughtfully out the window. His fingers gently kneaded her shoulder.

Dana wanted to keep sitting there with him. The small car offered an intimacy that made her feel close to him in ways other than just physical. But, after a few moments, she said, "Well, I'd better go in."

"I'll walk you up."

They climbed the outside stairs to the third floor, then trod along the walk to Dana's unit. At the door, Adam said, "Take a look at the parking lot from here and see if you spot the van you saw on the beach."

Dana turned around and looked over the railing. The parking lot lights beamed down on the guests' cars. Dana carefully scanned the area. "No, I don't see it."

"Good. I'll continue to keep an eye out as I drive back to the judge's."

She looked up at him. His face was shadowed, and she couldn't see his expression. "Be careful."

"I will. You watch out, too. I'll pick you up at two tomorrow afternoon. Will that give us time enough to get to Olympia by four?"

"It should. But I can drive out to the judge's."

"No sense in that when I can pick you up. Now, get inside and lock the door!"

* * * * *

The following morning, over her first cup of coffee, Dana wondered if she really had seen a rifle sticking out of that van window. Perhaps it had been something else, maybe a portable telescope someone was using to study ocean wildlife.

Whatever, the incident had left Adam wondering if she should continue to help him solve his father's murder. His concern for her safety touched her, but perhaps he was just using that as an excuse to put some distance between them. Maybe he was fighting his attraction to her as much as she was struggling against hers to him.

Or, maybe it was only wishful thinking that he might be interested in her, despite the kisses they had shared. Dana sighed and put her empty cup in the sink. It was all so complicated.

Whatever, she had an entire morning and part of the afternoon before she would see him again. A breather might be good, she decided. The last few days had been so intense. These few hours would give her a chance to do some investigating on her own. She especially wanted to follow up the lead regarding Judge Costain's recent speech to the Ocean City Chamber of Commerce.

She found the Chamber's listing in the phone directory, and called the number. The secretary who answered told her the president was Tom Moser, of Moser Realty. She gave Dana the address and phone number.

Dana decided to visit Mr. Moser's office rather than phone him. On her way out, she passed by the condo office. She noticed Jake Bingham standing behind the counter, talking to a young woman. A new guest, no doubt. Dana waved to him.

As Jake waved back, the woman turned and looked at Dana. Her eyes widened. She left the counter and

hurried out the door toward Dana.

"Oh, Miss Merrill! Please wait!" the woman called to her.

Dana stopped. She studied the approaching figure, wondering who the woman was. She wore faded blue jeans, a red T-shirt, and a hooded sweatshirt. A black knapsack hung over one shoulder.

The woman skidded to a stop in front of Dana. She pushed stringy brown hair out of her eyes. "Miss Merrill, I'm Glenda Jordan, from The Ocean City Gazette."

Recognition dawned on Dana. "Oh, yes, I read your article on Judge Costain's murder."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I'm doing a follow-up story, and I want to ask you about your and Adam Costain's investigation into the murder."

Caught off guard, Dana took a step backward. "Why, I . . ."

"Could we talk for a few minutes over coffee?" Glenda asked. "I don't want to impose on you, Miss Merrill, but being a journalist yourself, you know how exciting it is to put together a story. This is my first job, you see. I graduated last year from the University of Washington. Is that where you went, by chance?"

By now, Dana had regained her composure. "Yes, as a matter of fact, I did. But way before your time there."

Glenda laughed. "Oh, you can't be that old. I bet we had a lot of the same professors. Do you remember Dr. Hardigan? News Writing 101?"

Dana had to smile at the reminder of the genial professor who had kept his classes amused with funny stories. "Yes, I do. Is he still there?"

"You bet, and still telling those stories he's so famous for. But, let's go somewhere for coffee, shall we?" Glenda offered up a winsome smile.

Dana thought a moment. She didn't really want to give Glenda an interview, but she remembered how it had been on her first job. The eager excitement, the desperate need to make good.

It wouldn't hurt to offer a little encouragement to someone else in the ranks, she told herself.

But she must not reveal any important information. Novice or not, Glenda was the competition.

"Sure," she said. "Do you know Beryl's?"

"Of course," Glenda said, her plain face lighting up. "I'll meet you there."

Dana climbed in her car, noticing that Glenda drove an older model white compact.

Later, they sat at a window table in Beryl's, drinking coffee and eating cinnamon rolls. Dana learned that Glenda was originally from Seattle, too.

"I'd love to work for a paper like The Review," Glenda said with a sigh. "But The Gazette was the best I can do for now. But this is just a stop on my way to the top."

"If all your writing is like the article I read about Judge Costain, you shouldn't have any trouble," Dana said.

"Gee, thanks, Miss Merrill."

"Why don't you call me Dana?"

"Okay. Thanks, again. And speaking of the judge, how is your and Adam Costain's investigation going?"

Glenda pulled a tape recorder, pencil and notepad from her knapsack. She set the recorder between them and punched the On button.

Dana stared at the recorder. Although she sometimes used a recorder herself during interviews, she really didn't want Glenda to record their conversation. But if she protested, Glenda might think she was hiding something. She'd just have to be very careful what she said.

"I haven't said we were conducting an investigation," Dana pointed out.

"But you have been seeing Adam Costain."

"I'm acquainted with him," Dana admitted, then paused to gather her thoughts. "Look, Glenda, I came here to spend some time with the judge, to write a profile on him for my paper. When he was murdered, my editor told me to stay here and continue to search out a story. That's what I'm doing."

Glenda busily wrote on her notepad. "What about Adam Costain? I understand he's moved out to the judge's house."

"You'll have to ask Adam about that."

Glenda wrinkled her nose. "I phoned out there, but Adam's not granting any interviews. Not to me, anyway. But you have an in with him."

"What makes you think that, Glenda?"

"Why, you had dinner together last night at the Lightship Restaurant."

Dana stared at the young woman, who looked not in the least embarrassed to have such information.

"Everybody knows what everybody else does in a small town, Dana," Glenda said. "You should know that. And you and Adam, being newcomers, stick out. People notice you."

"I'll have to keep that in mind," Dana said dryly.

Glenda leaned forward, pencil poised over her pad. "Now, about the judge's murder. Who do you think the person was that you photographed hiding in the dunes?"

Dana gave an inward gasp that she just barely saved from being audible. Glenda knew about that, too? But why not? She probably had an informant in the sheriff's office. Besides, was there anything really wrong with the knowledge getting out? That was the way crimes were solved, wasn't it?

"I have no idea who that is," she said. "I hope the sheriff can find the person and question him." No way was she going to tell Glenda about spotting the man near the lighthouse.

"Do you think gangs have anything to do with the crime?" Glenda asked.

Dana hadn't thought of that. "I don't know, but I did hear that there was some gang activity in Ocean City."

Glenda nodded. "We've had our share of problems. Homes of wealthy residents like the judge have been vandalized by gang members looking for money and stuff to sell."

Dana shrugged. "Well, then, maybe gangs are connected to the judge's murder."

"He's given a couple of them pretty stiff sentences." At Dana's surprised look, she added, "I've done my homework on the judge. Anyway, do you think some of their fellow gang members were out for revenge?"

Dana shrugged. "Like I said, I suppose that's possible." She looked at her watch. "I really should be going, Glenda. I have some errands to run this morning."

"Okay." Glenda put on her winsome smile again. "Thanks for talking to me."

"No problem." Dana reached for the check, but Glenda grabbed it first. "This is on me," she said.

"Thanks," Dana said. "But I'm afraid I wasn't very much help to you."

"It was great just talking to you. Journalists like you are such an inspiration. "

Dana thought the compliment rang false, but decided no real harm had been done by having a chat with Glenda. They were allies, after all.

But they were competitors, too, Dana reminded herself.

* * * * *

After leaving Glenda, Dana drove around town for a while before heading toward Moser Realty. She wanted to make sure Glenda was not following her. But she saw no sign of the young woman's older model white compact.

Moser Realty was located in a small house of 1940s vintage, painted white with yellow trim, and one block off the town's main street. Inside, in what used to be a living room, a fortyish woman, neatly groomed and efficient-looking, sat behind a metal desk. She wore a navy blue suit, a white blouse, and a maroon neck scarf.

"May I help you?" the woman asked Dana in a friendly manner.

"I'd like to see Mr. Moser, if he's available."

"I'll check. Your name?"

"Dana Merrill."

The woman rose and, leaving a faint trail of perfume, disappeared into the next room. Dana waited, staring idly at bulletin boards showing pictures of houses and other properties for sale. A few seconds later, the woman returned. "Go right in," she said with a smile.

Tom Moser stood as Dana entered his office. He held out his hand across the desk. "Miss Merrill."

She grasped his hand, conscious of leathery, rough skin. "Hello, Mr. Moser."

"Sit down." He gestured to a metal chair with green vinyl upholstery.

Tom Moser looked to be in his fifties, with fine, gray hair that flopped onto his forehead. He wore a navy blue suit, a white shirt, and a maroon tie. The similarity of his outfit to his partner's told Dana it was the company uniform.

"Looking for some real estate in Ocean City?" he asked Dana.

"No, I'm here to ask you some questions about Judge Costain."

Moser's mouth dropped open. "You're an investigator?"

"I'm a reporter, from The Seattle Review."

Understanding dawned in his gray eyes. "Of course, I remember now. You're the one who found the judge."

Dana nodded while Tom Moser absently straightened some files that were lying on his desk. "Why would you want to ask me questions about the judge?"

Dana explained her assignment to profile Judge Costain and how she had seen the article about his speech to the Chamber of Commerce. "I thought you might have some insights into the judge, from

your dealings with him."

Tom Moser sat back and crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't think I can tell you anything of interest, Miss Merrill."

"What was your impression of the speech he gave?" Dana pressed.

"Hmm, let's see. . . . The topic was justice in the nineties, and I'd have to say it was depressing. He told us a lot of stories about having to let criminals go on technicalities. I got the feeling he was outraged by what's going on in the courts today. He asked us to tape the speech, which we did, but he died before I could give him a copy. You can have it, if you like."

"I would appreciate that," Dana said, pleased to be making some progress at last. She jotted a few notes on her pad, then asked, "How did you come to ask the judge to speak to your group?"

"I sold him the property his house is on."

"I see. So, you've had several occasions in which to deal with him."

"Yes."

"Do you know why anyone would want to kill the judge?"

"I thought you weren't investigating?" he said, his gray eyes taking on a wariness.

"I'm not," Dana said innocently. "It's for my article."

"No, I don't know why anyone would want to kill the judge. But, being a judge, I suppose he made a lot of enemies."

Moser straightened and pushed back his chair, signaling the interview was over. "I don't have the tape of his speech here at the office, but if you can stop by in a day or so, I'll have it then."

"Yes, I'll do that." Dana flipped her notebook closed and tucked it and her pencil away in her briefcase. She rose at the same time Moser did. "Thanks for talking to me."

He walked her to the door. "Any time. Good luck with your story."

As she was about to leave, he added, "Do you know if Adam Costain is going to put the house up for sale? I understand he's staying there now."

Word sure did get around in this town, Dana thought for the second time that day. "No, I wouldn't know about that. You'd have to ask him."

"I'll do that," Tom Moser said, with a wave of his hand.

As Dana headed back to the Gray Gull, she thought about her interview with the real estate broker. He had seemed open enough at first, but when he told her he had sold the judge his property, she'd sensed his wariness. Maybe he was hiding something. If so, what? Nothing in their interview had given her a clue to what it could be.

Her thoughts turned to Adam. She wondered how he had spent the morning. She realized that she missed him. Well, he would be picking her up in a few hours, for their trip to Olympia. Her heart beat faster at the thought of being with him again.

CHAPTER NINE

When Dana reached the Gray Gull, she headed for the office instead of her condo. Jake Bingham sat behind the registration counter, sorting through a pile of papers. Dana greeted him, then crossed to the coffee pot and filled a Styrofoam cup.

"You and Glenda have a good chat?" Jake asked, absently running a palm over the top of his silvery hair.

"Yes, she's quite an interesting person." Dana was pleased that Jake had so easily provided an opening to one of the subjects she wanted to discuss.

"She sure is a fan of yours."

"I think she's a good writer, too. Her Gazette article on Judge Costain was nicely done."

Jake shook his head. "Don't see how she could write about the judge as if he was someone she didn't know, after what he done."

"Oh?" Dana's heart skipped a beat, but she forced herself to casually finger an Ocean City Current Events brochure lying on the counter. "What did he do?"

Jake's bushy eyebrows shot up. "You mean she didn't tell you? Why, he sent her older brother, Fred, to the pen at Walla Walla. Fred stole a car and got caught. Not his first offense, either."

"Is he still in prison?"

"Nope. He got out awhile ago. Didn't come back here, though. Far as I know, no one's seen him."

Her heart beating excitedly, Dana pulled the photo of the man in the dunes from her briefcase and handed it to Jake. "Could this be Glenda's brother?"

Jake studied it for several moments. "Could be. He has dark hair . . . but it's really too hard to tell. Where'd you get this?"

Dana explained that she had taken it prior to discovering the judge's body.

The phone rang. While Jake answered the call and discussed rates and vacancies, Dana thought about what he had said. She was surprised The Gazette's editor had assigned Glenda to cover the judge's murder, given the circumstances; but perhaps he or she didn't know about Glenda's brother and Judge Costain.

When Jake hung up the phone, Dana put aside the startling news about Glenda Jordan and moved on to the next topic she wanted to plumb.

"Do you belong to the Chamber of Commerce, Jake?"

Jake looked surprised by the question. "Nope. I'm not much of a joiner. Why?"

"I read that Judge Costain spoke to the group not long ago. I thought you might have heard his talk and could give me your impressions of it."

"Can't help you there."

"I met Tom Moser, the group's president, today. He has a tape of the judge's speech that he's going to give me."

Dana noticed the wary look that crossed Jake's face. "Is something wrong?" she asked.

"You might want to watch out where Tom Moser is concerned."

"Really? Why?"

"He was involved in something that might have been shady."

"What was that?"

"Some rich backers were gonna build a big resort north of town--out near Judge Costain's place, as a matter of fact. Tom's partner, Harold Franklin, was accused of taking kickbacks from some land owners who wanted their land to be chosen. Tom swore he wasn't involved, but I dunno if I believe that or not. Anyway, the deal fell through."

"What happened to the partner?"

"Harold? He skipped town. Meanwhile, Tom's still in business. But, like I said, I don't know if I'd trust him."

The phone rang again. "Boy, we're hot today," Jake said as he reached for it.

Dana drained her cup, tossed it in the wastecan, and waved good-bye to Jake. He had certainly given her a lot to mull over, she thought as she went out the door.

* * * * *

"You were sure busy this morning," Adam said later, as he and Dana sped along Highway 101 on their way to Olympia. Dana had just finished telling him what she had learned about Glenda Jordan and Tom Moser. "But I wish you hadn't talked to Glenda." He glanced at her with a frown.

"I was afraid you'd feel that way," Dana said.

In truth, she had been reluctant to confess her encounter with Glenda, because she thought he'd be upset to know another reporter was on his trail. But she also knew she couldn't keep anything from him that might throw light on the judge's murder.

"But I did talk to her," Dana went on, "and in the process found out about her brother, Fred, who just may be our mystery man."

"I suppose he could be," Adam conceded. "But Tom Moser's partner, Harold Franklin, could be, too. Maybe the judge found out about their land scam."

"So, we have two missing men, who may have had reason to murder your father."

"Looks that way. Maybe we'll meet another suspect or two today."

His reminder of their destination made Dana forget, for now, about Harold Franklin and Fred Jordan. In just a little while, Adam would be thrust into a group of his father's friends and co-workers. Certainly that would be hard on him, given how he felt about the judge. She wanted to offer him some reassurance, something to let him know she understood how difficult this memorial gathering might be for him.

However, not knowing how he would respond made her afraid to speak up, and she kept quiet. It saddened her that she couldn't be more open with him. But, after all, she hadn't known him very long.

Long enough to exchange kisses, an internal voice reminded her.

Dana sighed and looked out the window. They had worked their way inland, past bays full of oysters and bogs full of cranberries. Mill towns with piles of lumber and smokestacks belching gray smoke. Pastoral settings where horses and cows grazed in fields. Now, they were on the freeway, where towns were kept at a distance, reached only by exits. The hillsides were a blend of many shades of green, dotted with the reds and yellows of turning leaves.

As interested as Dana was in the scenery, the man beside her intrigued her more. It was hard to keep

either her mind or her eyes off him. She glanced at him covertly. He looked every inch the professional in a dark brown suit and beige shirt. Square gold cufflinks peeked out from under the suit jacket's sleeves. It was the first time since she had met him that she had seen him dressed up.

She glanced down at her suit, a royal blue shade that she thought went well with her reddish hair. She hadn't planned to bring anything dressy on this trip to the beach. However, past experiences had taught her to be ready for any occasion, and at the last minute she had thrown the suit into her bag. Now, of course, she was glad she had.

A few miles later, as Olympia's domed capitol building popped into view, Adam pulled a slip of paper from his shirt pocket and handed it to Dana. "Here are the directions Leona gave me."

Dana helped him to navigate through exits, stoplights, and turns, and twenty minutes later they pulled up in front of a large, walled residential complex. "Ridgemont Estates" was written in script on one of the brick columns attached to the closed gate.

"Leona said to park on the street and buzz her apartment at the gate," Adam said.

Most of the parking spots were taken, Dana saw, but finally they found a space that fit Adam's Porsche. As she retrieved her clutch purse from the floor, Adam said warily, "You're not going to take notes tonight, are you?"

Dana's skin prickled with defensiveness, but now was not the time for them to get into a fight over her profession.

"No, Adam," she said through clenched teeth. "And I'm sorry you would even think that of me. But, are we going to ask any questions about who might have murdered your father?"

Adam cut the engine and pocketed his keys. "I don't know. I have no idea what this evening will bring. Let's just play it by ear, okay? And, ignore my rudeness just now. I'm really on edge about this occasion."

Dana nodded. He had opened up a way for her to express her support and reassurance, but she was still stinging too much from his dig to express anything sympathetic.

Adam punched in Leona's apartment number on the keypad at the gate, and they were admitted. They walked up the wide driveway lined with maple trees. The complex consisted of half a dozen cream-colored, two story buildings facing an inner courtyard with a free-form swimming pool, lawn chairs, and a miniature putting green.

A woman who looked to be in her fifties admitted them to Unit 6. "Adam Costain!" she exclaimed. "Come in! It's been a long time since I've seen you." At Adam's puzzled look, she added, "I'm Leona Sims."

"Sorry, I don't remember you," Adam confessed.

"No, I don't suppose you do. You were only five or six when I last saw you."

Adam introduced Dana, and Leona Sims enfolded her hand in a firm shake. "Did you know the judge?" Leona asked.

"No, unfortunately, I didn't. But I've heard a lot about him." Dana decided not to reveal her reason for being there, other than that she was Adam's "friend," as he had told Leona over the phone.

Leona Sims's black, silver-streaked hair was caught at the nape with a gold clip. Her simply-styled black dress flattered her slender, long-legged figure. Her large nose and wide mouth gave her face a masculine look that contrasted with eyes that were wide-set, long lashed, and very feminine.

Leona said, "Come on in, you two." Linking her arm through Adam's, she led them along a hallway. Dana, trailing behind, heard Adam ask, "So, you're an old friend of my parents?"

"Mainly of your father," Leona said. "We went to law school together at UCLA. We were even law partners for a while; then, when he married your mother, we pretty much went our separate ways. Oddly enough, we both ended up on Washington's Superior Court."

They reached the living room, where sliding glass doors led to a balcony overlooking the courtyard. The doors were open, and many of the guests were outside enjoying the afternoon sunshine.

Pastel colors dominated the living room decor. Pictures and figurines of art deco-style women--skinny figures in high heels and long, flowing skirts--provided dramatic accents. Dana decided that Judge Sims's home reflected her feminine side, a side she probably couldn't show too often in the courtroom.

The place was packed with people, none of whom Dana recognized. Adam was looking around as though they were all strangers to him too.

A large portrait of Judge Costain sat on an easel. The picture was a common one used in publications, but seeing it so enlarged made Dana feel like the judge himself was in the room. He peered out from under his thick eyebrows as though he were looking right at her.

The self-confident tilt of the judge's head reminded her of Adam. That was how he too held himself on occasion. He and his father had more in common than he realized, she thought wryly.

Leona introduced them around. As good as her memory was, Dana knew she would never remember all the names. Of course, she didn't dare take out her notebook.

One of the men they met was Burke Danforth. Dana guessed he was the Burke Marta Lopez had spoken of, who had visited Judge Costain along with Leona Sims.

Burke, too, was a Washington Superior Court judge. A heavy set man with a deeply lined face, he had the saddest eyes Dana had ever seen. Although he greeted them with a smile and a firm handshake, Dana sensed a weariness underneath his surface.

"Adam," Burke said, "nice to see you again, after all these years."

"I'm sorry I don't remember you," Adam replied as they shook hands.

"You were only a small boy when I met your father."

"So you and Leona and the judge were friends for a long time?"

"Very good friends," Burke said.

"You and Leona visited the judge at Ocean City," Adam said. "The housekeeper told us that two people named Leona and Burke came there several times."

Burke nodded. "She's right, we did. Bob was trying to convince us to build our own homes there. His Realtor, Tom Moser, showed us some land."

Dana's ears perked up at that. She wondered if Burke and Leona knew about the scheme Tom's partner, Harold Franklin, was allegedly involved in. However, she didn't think this was the occasion to ask.

"Why is our visiting Bob so interesting to you?" Burke asked Adam.

"I'm looking into the judge's murder on my own and want to talk to people who knew him."

"Well, I wish I could help you, but I'm afraid I can't. You must know, though, that judges make a lot of enemies. I myself am constantly harassed with hate mail from people who don't agree with decisions I make from the bench. Unfortunately, my critics don't understand that often I don't like those decisions

any more than they do. But we who uphold the law are bound to do just that, no matter what we might think of it personally."

"We can always work to change the laws," Dana pointed out.

Burke flashed a brief, cynical smile. "Sure. In the meantime, criminals go free and re-offend."

Dana and Adam mingled with the other guests for a while, then Leona called everyone to attention. "I want to thank you all for coming," she said, looking over the crowd. "We must honor Bob's request for no services, but Burke and I couldn't let his tragic passing go altogether unobserved. So we decided to gather you all here to say good-bye to him." She paused to glance fondly at the judge's portrait.

Dana happened to glance at Burke Danforth, who stood nearby. He was scowling at Leona. Curious, Dana thought. Didn't he want Leona to feel bad about their friend's death?

When Leona looked back at the guests, her eyes shone with tears. Burke was still scowling.

Leona sniffed, then went on, "I also didn't want to let the occasion pass without something, well, a bit formal. We lawyers love to talk, and I'm sure any one of us could deliver a eulogy fitting for Bob. However, I've ask Len Chavinski, from the prosecutor's office, to pay a special tribute. Len?"

Dana watched a blond-haired man in his mid-thirties push his way through the crowd. His twinkling eyes and dimpled chin made him appear too easy-going to be a prosecutor.

But when he began to speak she understood his strength. He had the most sonorous, compelling voice she'd ever heard. She'd bet that whenever he spoke, the jury listened.

"I first met Bob Costain when I was in UCLA law school and he was a deputy DA," Len said. "When I told him I was interested in becoming a prosecutor, too, he took a personal interest in me, and later in my wife, Jenny. As most of you know, she is also a lawyer. He became, in essence, my mentor. When I passed the bar, he helped me to get a job in Mel's office." He paused to nod at a tall man who Dana remembered was the Thurston County prosecutor.

"I have lots of stories to tell about Bob," Len went on. "And some he probably wouldn't appreciate me passing on--" A pause for laughter. "But I gotta tell you at least one, that happened when Jenny and I had Bob over for a barbecue. . . ."

Dana looked around for Adam, to see how he was taking all of this. But she did not see him. She scanned the crowd again, barely hearing Len's words as her concern for Adam grew.

* * * * *

Out on the balcony, Adam gripped the railing in an attempt to calm his churning emotions. He'd been stupid to come here today. It had been difficult enough, meeting people he did not remember and hearing all the accolades heaped on the judge. But now, to hear how the judge had mentored a young man who was Adam's age, while he had ignored his own son--well, it was just too much.

He'd thought he'd come to grips with the judge's absence long ago, but now he felt as though a knife had been plunged into his heart. Unable to stand hearing any more, he had escaped to the balcony.

He gazed across the courtyard at the bank of apartments and tried to concentrate on analyzing the architecture, as a way of removing himself emotionally. He always did that when he got into a situation that caused him pain. There was something so wonderfully objective about buildings.

He liked the cornices on the roof, but the columns appeared a little weak. Not structurally, but visually. His eye wanted something thicker, more substantial . . .

He heard the sliding door behind him edge open.

"Adam?" said a woman's voice.

He turned. "Oh, Dana."

"Is anything wrong?"

"No, I just needed some fresh air."

As Dana moved closer, the light from the apartment revealed her skeptical expression. He tensed, not wanting her to be able to read him so easily.

"Shall we leave after Leonard finishes?" she asked.

"Yeah. I've been here long enough. That okay with you?"

"Sure."

Dana stood beside him. He saw her look down at his hand gripping the railing. She reached out, hesitated just a fraction of a second, then placed her hand over his. Adam froze; then, as the warmth of her fingers seeped into his skin, he felt the tension inside him begin to uncoil.

They stood there for several moments in silence, then Adam said, "We'd better go inside before they notice we're gone."

CHAPTER TEN

When Adam and Dana returned to the living room, Adam saw that Len had finished speaking. Good, he wouldn't have to listen to any more of Len's praises of the judge.

Leona came up to them. "Wasn't that a nice tribute?"

"Very nice," Adam said, hoping he sounded sincere.

"You and Len should get to know one another," Leona continued. "You have a lot in common."

"Uh huh," Adam said, noncommittally.

Adam noticed that one of the lawyers had drawn Dana into a conversation. He remembered meeting the man earlier, George somebody, who'd had too much of Leona's wine. Now, he looked even more drunk, standing unsteadily on the balls of his feet, leaning into Dana with his hands jammed in his jacket pockets. Dana was gazing at him as though what he was saying was extremely important. Adam wanted to catch her eye, telegraph the message that he was ready to leave, but she wouldn't look his way.

His stomach churned. He told himself to calm down. He should be finding out if anyone knew anything about the judge's murder, instead of letting his emotions paralyze him. And, he should stop worrying about Dana. Hadn't she told him often enough that she could take care of herself?

"Is anything wrong, Adam?" Leona asked. Then her eyes darkened with apology. "Oh, how insensitive of me. Of course, this must be difficult for you. You've just lost your father."

I lost my father a long time ago, he wanted to say, but only smiled politely, to show he appreciated her concern. "It was nice of you to have this gathering, Leona."

"We all loved and respected Bob," she said. "He was such a good man."

Anger roiled inside Adam. He was fed up with hearing how wonderful the judge was. But he must be careful to keep his negative feelings from Leona and the others.

He looked around for Dana, saw she was still tipsy George's captive. He said to Leona, "Dana and I must go soon. It's a long drive back to Ocean City."

Leona looked surprised. "You're going back tonight? I would've thought you'd stay at your father's townhouse here in Olympia. You do have a key, don't you?"

"Yes, I have a key, but I didn't bring it with me."

"Your father and I kept keys to each other's places. Let me give you mine for his, just in case you change your mind and decide not to drive back tonight. Wait here." She headed down a hallway Adam assumed led to her bedroom.

He waited, jingling coins in his slacks' pocket and trying without much success to keep his gaze from straying to the portrait of the judge.

At last, Leona returned. "Here's the key," she said, handing him a small envelope. "I've included the address and directions. No need to give me back the key. I won't need it anymore." Her smile was sad.

Adam slipped the envelope into his inside jacket pocket. "Thanks, Leona."

He doubted he and Dana would be staying in the judge's Olympia townhouse. True, he didn't feel like driving home, but if he suggested staying over, she might think he was trying to seduce her.

Maybe he would be. Adam ran a hand over his forehead. At this point, he didn't know what he wanted to do about anything.

The only thing he knew for sure was that he wanted out of here. Now.

"Take care, Adam," Leona said. "I'll be in touch. How long do you think you'll be staying in Ocean City?"

"I'm not sure. As long as it takes to get the judge's affairs in order, things disposed of."

"Let me know if Burke and I can be of any help."

"Sure. Thanks again, Leona."

Adam saw that Dana was at last edging away from George. George took a step forward to follow her, but she laid a hand on his arm and said something. He stopped in his tracks, gave her a crooked smile, and fluttered his fingers in a good-bye.

* * * * *

Dana's heart thumped with excitement as she made her way through the crowd to Adam's side. She had just learned some very interesting information from George Freeman, that she was eager to share with Adam. However, one look at his drawn face told her now was not the time.

"Sorry I got waylaid," she said when she reached Adam's side.

"Old George what's-his-name is quite a talker," Adam said tersely. "Was he trying to pick you up?"

"No way," Dana said emphatically. "In fact, he told me something I think you'll be interested in."

"Yeah?" He sounded unconvinced. "Well, let's get out of here first."

When they were settled in Adam's car, he leaned his head back against the seat and closed his eyes.

"You probably don't feel much like driving back to the coast tonight," Dana said.

"You're right about that," he said flatly.

"I'd offer to drive, but I don't like to drive someone else's car. Especially not one as nice as yours. I've had a couple of fender-benders and think I might be accident prone."

"I appreciate the warning."

Silence hung in the air for several seconds, then Dana said, "Look, why don't we get a room? A couple of rooms," she amended hastily, "and drive back in the morning?"

Had she really said that? What was wrong with her? Even two rooms would be inviting trouble.

The hint of a smile hovered over Adam's lips as he reached into his inside jacket pocket and pulled out an envelope. "I have here the key and directions to the judge's Olympia townhouse."

"Where'd you get those? Did you bring them along?" She wondered if he had planned all along to stay overnight.

"No, Leona gave them to me. She was surprised we were planning to return to Ocean City tonight, and suggested we stay there instead. But I didn't mention it because I didn't want you to think I was trying to sleep with you. But now that you've suggested a motel, I throw this out as another option."

"What do you want to do?"

"I don't know."

Dana thought for a moment, then said, "It might be a good idea to stay at the judge's. Then we could look around. If someone is searching for something of his, maybe whatever they want is there, and we can find it. If they haven't taken it already."

He eyed her speculatively. "You won't be uncomfortable staying overnight with me?"

"We're both adults; we can handle it."

Was she just making excuses so that she could spend the night with him, see what happened between them? What did she want to happen?

She watched Adam's face, hoping to find out what he was thinking, but his expression was inscrutable. Finally, he said, "Okay, then, let's head for the townhouse."

They studied Leona's directions under the map light, then started off. Along the way, they stopped at a cafe for hamburgers, then at an all-night convenience store to pick up toothbrushes and toothpaste. Dana had enough cosmetics in her purse to make herself presentable in the morning.

Soon they pulled up to a complex of two-story townhouses surrounded by brick walls and an iron gate. Adam punched in the combination on the keypad and the gate rolled open to reveal a large lawn and a lighted fountain. They located the judge's unit and soon were inside.

The spacious rooms were furnished with the same masculine elegance as the beach house. Here, too, his photographs decorated the walls. The balcony side looked out on one of the fingers of water that formed the southern end of Puget Sound. Lights from buildings on the shore made squiggly white lines on the black water.

They toured a kitchen, a study, and a laundry room downstairs, two bedrooms and a bath upstairs. Peeking in the bedrooms reminded Dana of their sleeping arrangements. She guessed there would be no problem about that.

"The place doesn't appear to have been searched," Dana commented as they returned to the first floor.

"No, it doesn't," Adam agreed, "but maybe the searcher was careful not to mess things up. We can look around more thoroughly in the morning."

Dana settled down on the black and white tweed couch in the living room, but Adam paced. "I wish we'd never come here," he said.

"Why, Adam?"

"It's too much. Dealing with the beach house is one thing, but now there's this townhouse too. It's overwhelming. I had nothing to do with him for so many years, and now I'm surrounded by him."

"I understand how you must feel."

He stopped to stare at her. "Do you, really?" he challenged.

"Yes."

Dana went to his side and laid a hand on his arm. He was as rigid as a board. "Hearing Len really got to you, didn't it?"

"I suppose."

"The judge treated him like a son while ignoring you, his own flesh and blood."

"Yeah."

"That's a shame, Adam. Everyone deserves to have both a mother and a father. But weren't there any other, older males in your young life who took an interest in you? Relatives? Friends of your mother's?"

Adam said, in a grudging voice, "When my mother and I went to Italy, a couple of uncles and my grandfather were pretty good to me. But it wasn't the same as having a father."

"No, of course, it wasn't. I just thought there might have been some other men who played a positive role in your upbringing."

Adam was silent for a few moments, then he said, "I didn't mean to drag you into all this. I just thought if you could help identify the person you took the picture of, it might solve the judge's murder. But now we're into all this stuff about what a lousy father the judge was."

"I'm here because I want to be."

"You're here because you want to get a story."

The bitterness in Adam's voice stung Dana. Why was he always so cruel about her profession? Why did he always put her on the defensive?

"Adam, please," she said, to let him know his words hurt her.

"I'm sorry," he said, and she could tell he meant it. "I have no right to take out my anger on you. I'm glad you're here, for whatever reason."

Adam put his arm around her and drew her close. Dana laid her head against his chest, felt the beating of his heart. "I wish we could forget all this," he murmured.

"I know. Me, too." She slipped both her arms around his waist, conscious of lean muscle and firm flesh.

Adam reached out and tilted up her chin so that they could gaze into one another's eyes. He brushed away a lock of hair from her forehead, then traced a forefinger down her cheek and over her lips. Then, with a groan that seemed to come from deep inside him, he settled his mouth over hers.

Desire spiraled through Dana, settled heavily in the pit of her stomach. He teased her lips apart and soon their tongues were mingling. The contact sent bolts of pleasure throughout her body. Her pulse throbbed, her skin flamed with heat. Adam held her tightly against him, arching her back so that her breasts pressed against his chest. She ran her hands over the steely muscles of his back and shoulders. Never had a man made her so aware of her femininity, of her raw hunger for this kind of mating.

Thoughts of the bedrooms upstairs popped into her mind. She could easily visualize the two of them naked, tangling in the sheets on one of the beds. It would be so easy to give in and make love with him.

...

And Dana probably would have, had not Adam at last eased his mouth away from hers. "Whew!" he exclaimed. "Looks like we're getting involved again."

"I guess," Dana murmured when she had caught her breath.

"But I'm not going to apologize, this time."

"You don't need to. I wanted it as much as you did."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. Now, I don't feel like I took advantage of you. Come on, let's take a load off and sit down."

He led her to a couch that faced the balcony. Tentatively, she sat down beside him. "Don't be afraid," he said, putting his arm around her and drawing her close. "I'm not going to put any pressure on you." They sat in silence for a while, his fingers tenderly kneading her shoulder.

"You involved with anybody back home?" he asked at length.

"Not really."

"That doesn't sound very definite."

"Well, I go out. There's a guy on another newspaper, and a man who lives in my apartment building. Nothing serious with either one." She glanced at him. "What about you?"

"Nothing serious in my life, either. Not anymore."

The way he said the last part prompted her to ask, "So there was someone serious?"

"Mmm hmm. We were engaged, until I found her in bed with my best friend."

"Oh, Adam, that must have been terrible!"

"Yeah. But I got over it."

She wondered if he really had. "Any scars?"

"Scars? Sure. What happened makes it hard to trust again."

"I'm sure that would be the case with me, too."

"We could always make love and see what happens after that," he said, nuzzling her ear, setting off little fires inside her again.

"Yes, I suppose we could. But is that what you really want? To just hop into bed with someone for the moment?"

"I'd hardly call it 'hopping into bed' in our case. We have known each other for a while."

"Yeah, a few days. But I want more from my relationships than just a few minutes in bed. Although I must admit, the idea does have a certain amount of appeal." She laughed lightly, remembering her fantasy during their kiss.

"No, you're right; it's a bad idea to get any more involved. Let's just relax and look at the view."

Although Dana tried to relax, her stomach churned. Stopping their escalating passion was the rational thing to do, the right thing to do, but she could not deny the disappointment she felt.

After a while, she said, "Adam, I think we'd better call it a night."

"Are you sure?" He kissed her hair. Desire flared again inside Dana, and she knew without a doubt that she'd better put some distance between them. Now. Before she did something she would later regret. Placing her hands against his chest, she eased herself away and stood up.

"Yes. Which bedroom do you want?" she asked.

He heavy a sigh heavy with disappointment. "Neither. I'll sleep here."

Dana looked down at him, trying to decide whether or not to argue. His eyes were closed, the lashes fanned over high cheekbones. Her gaze moved to his mouth, which brought back the memory of his kiss. How easy it would be to give in and tell him they could share the same bed. . . * * * * *

"Goodnight, then," she said aloud, with a firmness that dispelled her fantasies.

"Goodnight, Dana," he said without opening his eyes.

Dana climbed the stairs and went into the spare bedroom. She rummaged around in the closet and found a lightweight blanket. She carried it downstairs and laid it over Adam. He was still in the same position, but she couldn't tell whether or not he was sleeping. She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, then leaned down and kissed his cheek.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The following morning when Dana went downstairs, Adam was still asleep on the couch. Not wanting to awaken him, she wandered into the kitchen to see if there was anything they could have for breakfast. The refrigerator was nearly bare, as she would expect of an owner who planned to be gone for a week.

However, in the cupboard, she found a tin of coffee and boxes of cereal and powdered milk. The freezer yielded a loaf of bread. She and Adam could make do with those and stop on the way home for something more substantial.

She had the coffee perking and was mixing up the powdered milk when Adam appeared in the doorway. His rumpled clothing and tousled hair gave him an appealing look that made her want to run over and give him a good morning kiss.

She settled for a verbal greeting instead. "Good morning."

"Hello. Guess I slept in." He grinned sheepishly.

"You probably needed it."

"Coffee smells good."

"It just finished perking too. Good timing." She poured a mug full and handed it to him, conscious of their fingers brushing in the process.

He looked at her over the rim of his cup. "Find anything we can eat?"

"Some cereal and toast. I'll fix it while you wash up."

"Deal." He disappeared in the direction of the bathroom.

A few minutes later, they were seated at the table, eating the food Dana had prepared. Dana took the opportunity to fill Adam in on her conversation with George Freeman.

She said, "George and I were talking about Leona, Burke, and your father being such good friends, and he told me that it was a little more than friendship. It seems Leona was in love with your father, and hoped he'd marry her. Burke is in love with Leona, and wants her to marry him. According to George, Leona kept saying no, hoping your father would come around."

"Was the judge in love with her?"

"George didn't say."

"George looked pretty out of it to me. You're going to take his word for all this?"

"I think he was telling the truth. Alcohol loosens the tongue, you know. Besides, it fits with what I observed myself."

Adam helped himself to another piece of toast. "Which was?"

"Remember how teary-eyed Leona was when she gave her little speech about the judge?"

"Vaguely."

"Well, she was. I happened to look at Burke just then. He was scowling at her, as though he didn't like her show of sentiment."

"I think you're reading a lot into a little. Maybe he was having indigestion at the time."

Dana pursed her lips. "I prefer my theory. Don't you see, Adam? That gives Burke a motive for murdering your father."

"He decided to get rid of the opposition."

"Right."

Adam raised an eyebrow in skepticism.

"I know, you think all my theories are way out." Dana had been excited about her news, but Adam's lukewarm response dampened her enthusiasm.

"I think we may be grasping at straws, so to speak. But I suppose it's worth considering."

"Gee, thanks," she said sarcastically.

He raised an eyebrow at her, but didn't say anything.

* * * * *

After breakfast, they spent a couple of hours searching the apartment. They found nothing they considered significant and, shortly after that, they left.

As they drove out of the complex, Dana watched morning sunlight arc over the evergreen trees. It promised to be another beautiful September day. As Dana gazed idly around, a car parked on a side street under a maple tree caught her eye. It was an older model, white compact.

The kind of car Glenda Jordan drove.

When Adam turned the corner, Dana craned her neck to get a better look at the car. But they went by so fast, she couldn't tell if it was Glenda's or not. She didn't even know if anyone was behind the wheel.

If it was the fledgling reporter's car, was she following Dana and Adam in pursuit of a story? Or for some other, more sinister, reason?

Dana kept her eye glued to the side mirror, but she didn't see the white car behind them. A couple of times, she looked casually over her shoulder. The car was not in sight then, either.

Adam glanced curiously at Dana. "What's wrong? Do you think someone's following us?"

"Uh, I just decided it doesn't hurt to be on the alert. But I don't see anyone."

Dana decided to keep her suspicions about seeing Glenda Jordan's car to herself. Telling Adam might send him into one of his tirades about the press invading people's privacy. She didn't need that right now.

However, she hoped she hadn't made a mistake that would come back to haunt her.

Half an hour later, when they had left the city behind and were on the freeway, Adam broke the silence to ask, "Have you heard from your research assistant on that project you gave her, to see if any criminals who were let off on technicalities have been murdered, like Manett was?"

"I talked to Renee yesterday, and she's still working on it."

"Well, it's such a long shot, that her report probably isn't worth waiting for. I hoped to find that person you photographed, too, by now."

"You sound really discouraged. Does this mean you're going to stop investigating?" Dana was surprised at how that possibility alarmed her. "You've been so determined to find out what happened to your father," she reminded him.

"I know. But nothing's turned up. We've searched the ocean home and his Olympia townhouse, and found nothing. We caught a glimpse of a person who might be the one you photographed, but nothing's come of that. We have a few unsubstantiated theories. I guess I am discouraged."

Adam took his eyes from the road long enough to glance at her. "The only thing that seems to be going forward is between you and me. . . ."

So that was it, Dana thought. It wasn't so much that the investigation was discouraging; what was happening between them bothered him. Withdrawing from the investigation would also be a way for him to withdraw from her.

She said, "If my being around is complicating things, I can go off on my own. That's what I wanted to do in the first place."

He raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Oh? As I recall, you were as eager to talk to me as I was to you."

"That was at first. When I learned you wanted to talk off the record, I told you I would do my own searching. You were the one who wanted me around, so that I could help you find the person in the picture."

"Are we quarreling here?"

Dana's stomach tensed. "I don't know. Are we?"

Several freeway miles of icy silence went by, then Dana said, "Look, Adam, if we kept our personal relationship out of the matter of your father's murder, we'd get along better."

"I don't know if that's possible, any more," he said in a low voice.

Dana's heart began to thud. Did that mean he was beginning to care for her? Still, she felt compelled to back off. "Then maybe I'd better go my own way when we return to Ocean City, before things get any more complicated."

"What about your story?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm sure my story will come out all right. I can write up what I have so far. Then, when and if the crime is solved, I'll do a follow-up article."

"I see."

"What about you? Will you go back to Sacramento right away?" She held her breath as she waited for his answer.

"Maybe. But, if I do, I'll have to come back here again to dispose of the judge's things. No matter what happens, winding up his affairs will take time."

Dana would be back in Seattle by then, back at her job with The Review. "Tom Moser wanted to know if you'll be selling the beach place," she ventured.

"I'm sure I will, eventually. I know I don't want to live there."

They both lapsed into silence again. Too tense to lean on the headrest and relax, Dana pressed her back rigidly against the seat and clasped her hands in her lap. She tried to focus on the scenery, the hillsides with their swatches of red and gold, the quaint little towns, the occasional glimpses of a hidden lake, but her thoughts about Adam and their future demanded all her attention.

* * * * *

When they reached Ocean City, Adam headed toward the Gray Gull. What would happen when he dropped her off? Dana wondered. Was this good-bye?

However, before they arrived at the condo, one of the sheriff's cars appeared behind them. "He's flagging me over," Adam said as he glanced in the rearview mirror.

Adam pulled the Porsche to the side of the road. The other vehicle pulled up behind them. A man got

out and came to Adam's window. Dana recognized him as Deputy Grayson, the officer who had responded when her condo had been broken into.

"We've been looking for you," Grayson said to Adam.

"Why?" Adam asked, and for one wild moment Dana thought, no, surely, they're not going to arrest Adam! But then Grayson said, "Someone broke into your father's place last night. Rinaldi and Leaming are out there now."

"We'll head there right away," Adam said.

Grayson nodded and returned to his car.

All thoughts of dropping Dana off seemed to have fled from Adam's mind as he concentrated on getting them to the beach house as fast as he could while still maintaining the speed limit. They finally pulled into the driveway and parked behind the sheriff's department car sitting near the deck. Rinaldi and Leaming were searching the ground near the stairs.

As Adam and Dana alighted from the Porsche, Rinaldi came toward them. "There's been a break-in," he said.

"That's what Deputy Grayson told us," Adam said. "We saw him in town."

"They got in through the back door." Rinaldi pointed to the broken glass panes in the door's upper half and the shards scattered about the deck.

"What about the alarm system?" she asked. "You left it on, didn't you, Adam?"

"Yes, I did." He looked at the deputy, waiting for his answer.

"Oh, it worked, all right," Rinaldi said. "But by the time we heard from the security company and got out here, whoever broke in was gone."

"When did it happen?" Adam asked.

"About three a.m."

"Was anything taken?"

"That's for you to determine. We can go in, but don't touch anything until we finish dusting for prints." Rinaldi led them toward the stairs. "Let me warn you, it's a mess."

Rinaldi hadn't been kidding, Dana saw as she followed him and Adam over the threshold. Drawers were pulled out and cupboard doors hung open. The counters and floors were littered with smashed crockery, silverware, pots and pans.

Worried about the judge's photographs, Dana held her breath when they walked into the living room. Surprisingly, they were untouched. One or two hung askew, but none had been damaged.

However, the rest of the house was just as big a mess as the kitchen. The devastation was, in fact, so rampant that Dana's eyes stung with tears. It appalled her that anyone would be so destructive.

"Think anything is missing?" Rinaldi asked when they had picked their way through the chaos.

"I couldn't say right now," Adam replied. "It'll take some time to figure that out."

Rinaldi nodded. "Just let us know after you've had a chance to put the place back together. I don't envy you that job," he said, running a hand through his blond hair.

"Do you have any idea who did this?" Adam asked.

"Most likely it was kids looking for money and stuff to fence. Much as we hate to admit it, there has

been some gang activity here in the last few months."

Dana remembered that Deputy Grayson had told her the same thing after the condo break-in. Also, Glenda Jordan had asked her if the judge had been involved with gangs. "I understand the judge sentenced some gang members to prison," she said to Rinaldi.

"I wouldn't know about that," Rinaldi said. "That wouldn't have been in this jurisdiction."

After Rinaldi and his men left, Dana wanted to offer to help Adam clean up the mess. However, considering their conversation on the drive back from Olympia, she was unsure of the status of their relationship.

Finally, she decided to at least offer. "I'd be glad to help you put things back in order," she told him. "Or you can take me to the Gray Gull."

He gave her a long and steady look. "Taking you back sounds like a good-bye."

"I thought that's what you wanted."

"I thought that's what you wanted."

"No, Adam, I . . ."

"We're quarreling again." Picking his way carefully around an overturned chair, he came to stand beside her. "Dana, I don't want to say good-bye. I just thought maybe it was for the best. But I'm not even sure I could say good-bye to you."

Dana looked up at him. "What does that mean?"

"Just that I don't want you to walk out of my life right now. But I don't have the right to ask you to stay in it, either. You're in danger if you hang around me."

"I told you I'm not one to back off when the going gets tough."

He gave her a soft and lingering smile. "Okay, then, let's get busy."

* * * * *

They tackled the kitchen first, sweeping up the broken dishes, picking up the pots and pans and the silverware. From there, they worked their way through the living room and then the rest of the house.

It was in the judge's study that Adam first noticed something missing. "All the computer disks are gone," he told Dana. He showed her the empty wooden box where they had been stored.

"You're sure they weren't dumped out somewhere?" Dana said.

They spent some time looking for the disks among the scattered papers on the judge's desk and on the floor, but didn't find them.

Adam said, "Maybe getting the disks was the purpose of the break-in. Then the place was messed up to make it look like they were after other things as well."

"Could be. Had you looked at all those disks? Do you remember what was on them?"

"I did look at them. It was mostly correspondence. I didn't see anything out of the ordinary. Of course, as I've said before, I don't know what I'm looking for. There might have been something important that I didn't recognize."

"Lots of times disks are backups for what's on the hard drive," Dana pointed out. "Maybe we should check that."

"Good idea."

Adam sat down at the desk and turned on the computer. Instead of the usual icons to indicate the machine was booting up, the screen filled with lines of z's.

"Oh, great," Adam said. "What happened to the computer?" He punched a couple of keys, but the z's continued to dominate the screen landscape.

Adam looked at Dana. "Do you know anything about computers?"

"Not when something like this happens. I wonder if whoever took the disks also disabled the hard drive."

"Could be." Adam turned back to the keyboard and continued to punch keys. Finally, he gave up.

"We'll have to let this go until I can get it to a repair shop."

Adam turned off the machine and swiveled around in the chair so that he faced Dana. "Suppose the judge did have some information on a computer disk that incriminated someone. Of course, the person would want the disk."

"Right."

"But, think about it, Dana; if you had a disk with incriminating information on it, would you keep it out in the open with the rest of your disks, or would you hide it?"

"I'd probably hide it. But sometimes people 'hide' things out in the open."

"That's true. So maybe the person got what he was looking for and maybe he didn't."

"How can we ever know that now?"

"We can't. But let's assume he didn't get what he was looking for, and that the judge hid the disk elsewhere. Where might that be?"

Dana shook her head. "I haven't a clue."

Adam sighed. "Me, neither."

They went back to the living room. Adam sank onto the couch, while Dana folded her arms and looked absently out the picture window. The minutes ticked away.

When Dana turned away from the window, her gaze fell on two photographs that hung crookedly. She crossed the room to straighten them. As she touched the frame of one, her fingers came in contact with something sticking to its back.

"What's this?" She pulled the picture away from the wall and craned her neck to look behind it. An envelope was stuck to the picture's paper backing. Excitement quickened her pulse as she carefully pulled it free. Had she found the hidden disk?

CHAPTER TWELVE

"Look what I found!" Dana announced.

Adam jumped up and hurried to her side. Dana slit open the envelope with her fingernail and looked inside. "Keys," she said, disappointed that it wasn't a disk. She pulled out two keys attached to a metal ring and held them out to Adam. "Ever seen these before?"

"No." Adam took them from her and studied them. "But my guess is, they go to a door, rather than, say, a safety deposit box or a locker."

He pulled a ring of keys from his pocket. Flipping through them, he singled one out and laid it over one of the new keys, then over the other. "They don't match the key to this house," he said.

"What about the townhouse in Olympia?"

Fishing around in his slacks pocket, he pulled out the key Leona Sims had given him and matched it with the keys Dana found. "Nope. Not the townhouse, either."

Dana peered closely at the keys lying in Adam's palm. "There's something scratched on this one." She picked it up and held it so that the light from the picture window beamed on it. "It appears to be the letters CFL."

Adam took a look. "I think you're right. CFL," he mused. "Someone's initials?"

"Maybe. But whose? Not the judge's, or Leona's, or Burke's." Dana ticked off the first people who came to mind. "The L could be Lopez, but C and F aren't Marta's."

"Maybe her husband's," Adam said. "Do you know what his first name is?"

"No."

"Me, neither. But the next time I see her, I'll ask."

They looked behind the other pictures, but found no more hidden envelopes.

"Well, the keys are something, anyway," Adam said when they were finished. He sat down on the couch. Reaching up, he grasped Dana's hand and pulled her down beside him.

Dana didn't realize how tired she was until she sank into the cushions. He put his arm around her and drew her to him, gently kneaded her shoulder. It felt good to be close to him again, Dana thought, with an inward sigh of contentment.

His mouth nuzzled her hair; warm breath tingled her scalp. "Thanks, Dana. I couldn't have done all this without you."

"You're welcome; but, yes, you could have."

"Okay, but I wouldn't have wanted to do it without you."

"It's nice to be appreciated." Dana was glad she had offered to help him. Working together had seemed to heal the rift they'd had on the way back to Ocean City.

They sat there awhile, then Adam broke the silence. "Let me show my appreciation by taking you to dinner."

"Well . . . I have worked up an appetite."

"Good. I know a small, cozy cafe that serves great pasta. I found it the first night I hit town."

"Sounds like my kind of place."

* * * * *

The following afternoon, Dana made a visit to the Ocean City Library. She returned to her condo with an armload of books. As she opened her door, the phone began to ring. She threw the books and her purse on the sofa and ran to answer it. She hoped it was Adam.

It was. "How're you doing?" he asked.

"Fine. What's up?"

"I met with Sheriff Dickerson this morning, and told him about the missing computer disks. I also asked him if he's found out whether the woman Jurgen Manett murdered had any relatives who might want revenge. If you're not too busy, I'll come over and fill you in."

Dana wondered if she'd ever be too busy to see Adam. "Sure, come on over."

"Good; I'll be there in half an hour."

Dana hung up, retrieved the books from the sofa, and carried them to her makeshift desk on the dining room table. Her visit to the library had been prompted by her decision to write an article on Washington's lighthouses. Since the article on the judge was in limbo, she might as well work on something else. After learning she was a member of the press, the librarian had generously granted Dana library privileges for the duration of her stay.

She organized the books to start on her research. But now that she knew Adam was coming, it was difficult to concentrate on lighthouses. Less than twenty four hours since they had seen one another and already she missed him.

She picked up a book titled Lighthouses of the Pacific Northwest. Flipping through it, she saw that it had a chapter on each lighthouse, with accompanying photos and maps. She decided to make a list of all the lighthouses she wanted to write about. There was one at Cape Disappointment, at Destruction Island, at Grays Harbor, and of course at Cape Freedom.

She booted up her laptop and created a file for each lighthouse. Instead of writing out the name of each, she used initials. Cape Disappointment lighthouse would be "CDL," Destruction Island lighthouse "DIL," and so on. Dana turned to the other materials she had brought from the library and soon the table was littered with papers and open books.

She was deep in her work when the doorbell rang. Adam! Excitement hummed through her veins as she ran to open the door.

"Hi." Holding a grocery bag, he leaned against the doorjamb.

"What's that?" she asked, standing aside to let him come in.

"Dinner stuff. That is, if you don't mind eating here tonight?" He paused to raise an eyebrow at her.

"Not at all. But it's my turn to treat."

He headed for the kitchen and began unloading the bag. "You can have a turn some other time. I kept the menu easy; steak, potatoes, green beans, salad fixings, and cheesecake for dessert." He named off each item as he removed it from the bag.

"You thought of everything," she said.

While they made the salad, he told her about his meeting with the sheriff. "Dickerson agreed that because only the computer disks are missing, the appearance of an overall robbery might have been faked."

"Did he have any news on Jurgen Manett's victim's relatives?"

"Yes, the woman had a husband and a brother. The husband is in the clear, because he's been in jail. The brother they haven't found yet."

"So he's a good suspect."

"Maybe." Adam carried the salad into the dining room and put it on the uncluttered end of the table.

"Looks like you're hard at work. What are you writing? Your article about the judge?" He bent over to read the laptop screen.

Dana's spine bristled. "No, I'm not, so there's nothing for you to censor. I'm researching lighthouses for another article."

"I see." He picked up one of the books and idly glanced at the title. "Maybe you ought to contact the Coast Guard again and see if they would give you a look at the one by the judge's house."

"I might do that."

From the corner of her eye, she saw that Adam, his brow furrowed, was still looking at her laptop screen. She slammed the refrigerator door shut and hurried to his side. "What's wrong?"

"Something you wrote caught my eye." He pointed to the initials "CFL."

"Yeah, CFL stands for Cape Freedom Lighthouse. I decided that instead of writing out each name, I'd use the initials . . ." Her voice died away as something dawned on her. "CFL . . . aren't those the letters that were scratched on the keys we found yesterday?"

"That's why they caught my eye." He reached into his slacks pocket, took out the two keys, and looked at them. "Yep, the letters are CFL."

"I don't know why I didn't think of that when I first typed them. Do you suppose these keys are to the lighthouse?" Dana asked, her eyes wide with astonishment.

"There's only one way to find out," he said. "Grab your jacket and let's go."

"What about dinner?"

Adam looked at his wristwatch. "We've got time to go out there first. It's only four now."

"Wouldn't it would be better to wait till after dark? If these are the keys, we don't want anyone to see us going in the lighthouse. It would be trespassing."

"If we wait till dark, we'll have to use a flashlight inside to see our way around."

"True. But there are no windows for the light to shine through, either. I read in one of the library books that they had to board up the windows because the high winds kept blowing them out."

Adam laughed good-naturedly. "Okay, Dana, you win."

* * * * *

Later, as the sun sank below the horizon, Dana and Adam set out for the lighthouse. They decided to leave Adam's car at the judge's and approach the lighthouse from the beach, rather than search out the road that led there from the highway. When they arrived at the judge's, Adam took a few minutes to retrieve a flashlight from the house, then they were off.

By now, pale moonlight bathed the beach, turning the sand to gold and the driftwood to silver. Adam took Dana's hand as they trudged along. They spoke little. Dana kept her eyes on the lighthouse's beam, a brilliant white light against the darkening sky.

They left the beach, scaled the incline to the point, and at last, reached the tower. Dana headed straight for the door, but Adam tugged on her hand to stop her. "Let's wait awhile before we try the keys," he said, "to make sure no one's around."

They strolled around the lighthouse, pausing to look up at it, then out to sea, as though this were a casual visit. Gazing at the dunes reminded Dana of chasing the mysterious man the other time they had visited this spot. She remembered the rifle pointed at them from the van window. She shivered. Someone with a rifle could be hiding in the dunes at this very moment. Maybe they shouldn't have come here, after all.

"Okay," Adam said at last, "let's try the keys."

They climbed the steps to the door. Dana held her breath and watched over Adam's shoulder as he poked one key at the deadbolt. It didn't fit. He tried the other key. It slid in easily. He turned it, and she heard a click. The first key fit in the doorknob lock, and soon they were inside.

The room was dank and musty, and smelled of cold cement. Adam snapped on his flashlight. Dana followed the light as it moved over a small oak desk, a couple of wooden straight chairs, and an old-fashioned, pot-bellied stove. When Adam beamed the light through a doorway, Dana saw curved stairs leading to the top of the tower.

"Might as well check out the desk," Adam said, as he headed toward it.

They searched all the drawers, but the desk was completely empty. "I guess this room isn't used as an office anymore," Dana commented.

"Shall we go up?" Adam motioned with his light toward the stairway.

Dana hesitated. The stairway looked dark and spooky. But she said, "Sure; we might as well tour as much as we can."

Adam led the way. The stairs were not solid, Dana soon discovered, but rather a spiral of metal plates attached to a railing. She placed her foot tentatively on the bottom rung, hoping it was sturdy.

It was. Around and around they went, climbing higher and higher. Once Dana reached out to touch the wall. It was so ice cold that she jerked her hand away.

A third of the way up, the stairs gave way to a platform that connected to the structure's round walls. They trod across it, their footsteps echoing on the bare floor, and continued up the stairs. Soon they came to another such platform, and, after a few more steps, a third. Since the tower narrowed as it neared the top, this one was smaller than the previous two.

A sleeping bag lay on the third platform. Its flap was open, as though someone had just crawled out. Nearby sat a paper sack sporting a local fast food restaurant's logo, and a tin can holding a crushed cigarette.

"It looks like someone has been staying here," Dana said. "Do you suppose it's the mysterious man in the blue shirt?"

"Could be," Adam said, "since he seems to hang around the area."

"Unless it's someone from the Coast Guard."

"I doubt they would leave a mess like this." Adam nudged the paper sack with the toe of his shoe.

"Probably not," Dana agreed.

A look around turned up other remnants of habitation--a pair of dirty socks, a plastic fork, an old Ocean City Gazette--but nothing to reveal the occupant's identity.

Dana gazed up at the stairs leading the rest of the way to the light room. "What if whoever's been staying here is up there?"

"There's one way to find out." Adam took a step toward the stairs.

Dana put a hand on his arm. "Wait. If someone's been staying here on the sly, he won't want to be discovered. Do you think we should go any farther?"

"You can stay here, if you want, but I'm going on ."

"No way! If you're going up, then so am I."

He wrinkled his brow. "But--"

"Never mind, I'm going!"

"Okay, but be ready for anything."

Dana judged there were about a dozen stairs left to reach the light room. As they climbed and the tower continued to narrow, the walls closed in on her. She felt like she was in a tomb.

She cocked her head for any sound from above that might indicate someone waited for them; however, except for the shuffle of their feet on the metal steps, all was quiet.

They reached the lightroom and went inside. Above them, on a thick platform, the giant light sat beaming out to sea. Warmth from it drifted down over Dana, chasing away the chill of the stairwell.

A quick look around told them that no one was there. "What about the gallery?" Dana pointed to the door leading to the narrow walkway that surrounded the lightroom. "Someone could be hiding out there."

"Gallery?" Adam said.

"Yes, that's what the walkway is called. I learned that from my research."

"Okay, let's check it." Adam crossed to the glass wall and began methodically to walk around the room, peering outside. He turned to Dana. "I don't see anyone. I really think we're alone here."

Dana nodded and began to relax. She had finally fulfilled her dream of visiting a lighthouse. Wanting to take advantage of these moments, she walked around the room, looking at the view from each direction. Facing inland, past the woods, she could see the lights on the highway leading to Ocean City. To the South lay the city itself, an arc of glittering lights that traced the shoreline. To the West lay the ocean, where the steady light above her head cast its white beam on the black water. And to the North, more shoreline and the darkness of undeveloped land.

"Terrific view," Adam said. "But we'd better get going, don't you think?"

Dana nodded, and they made their way back down the stairs. After taking a last look around and finding nothing of interest, left the lighthouse. Adam carefully locked the door behind them.

"I wonder when the occupant is going to return?" he said, pocketing the keys. "Or if he's ever going to return. Maybe his stay is over."

"We could wait around awhile tonight and see if anyone comes," Dana suggested.

He glanced at her. "That's what I was thinking. But are you sure you want to do that?"

"Of course." She looked at her watch, saw in the dim light that it was just nine. "It's still early."

Leaving the lighthouse's clearing, they hiked to the edge of the forest. Adam flattened a little hollow in the grass and they huddled there, leaning their backs against a pine tree. It wasn't long before his arm

went around her shoulders. Although she wanted to stay alert to their surroundings, she couldn't help but feel a certain contentment nestling against him.

Time passed. Dana listened to the steady crash of waves against the rocks below and the wind soughing through the trees. Occasionally, they heard rustling in the underbrush, which put them on the alert; but when no one appeared, they concluded the noise came from the activities of nocturnal animals. Still, Dana's nerves stayed tautly strung, as she waited for something to happen.

Finally, Adam said, "I'm beginning to think this is a waste of time. He's either not coming back or he saw us earlier and is staying away. We should give up for now and go back to the house."

"I'm for that," Dana agreed.

* * * * *

Back at the judge's, Adam made coffee. They took their mugs into the living room and sat on the leather couch. "I suppose we need to report what we found in the lighthouse to Sheriff Dickerson," Adam said. "He'll inform the Coast Guard. Then there'll probably be so many men around the place that the guy will be scared away."

"I know," Dana agreed. "But the only way the two of us could ever catch him would be with a twenty-four hour stakeout, and I doubt either of us wants to do that."

"No, that isn't feasible. I can keep an occasional eye on the place, but I don't want to spend all my time there. I guess we'll just have to call in the sheriff."

"Maybe we can think of some other way to trap the guy," Dana said.

"I hope so," replied Adam.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The following day, Dana phoned her editor, James, and told him about her article on lighthouses. "That sounds good," he said.

He wasn't so enthusiastic about the stalemate with Judge Costain's profile. "You may be just wasting your time staying there," James said. "Maybe you'd better come back to Seattle and write up what you have."

"I still have another week left," Dana reminded him. "And after that, I'll use my vacation time. It's really important to me to stay here and see this through."

Dana didn't want to return to Seattle. Not while Adam was still in Ocean City.

"I can probably grant you more time than just another week," James said, still sounding reluctant. "I hate to see you use your vacation time. But keep me posted."

She asked James to put Renee on the line. "How's the research project I gave you coming along?" Dana asked her.

"Well, so far, I haven't found that any other criminals who got off on technicalities have been murdered, like Jurgen Manett was."

"I suppose it is a pretty wild theory," Dana said, disappointed that her idea appeared to have no merit.

"Don't give up yet," Renee said. "I've still got some names to follow up."

* * * * *

Adam called to tell Dana he had reported to Sheriff Dickerson what they found in the lighthouse and their suspicions that the mysterious man in blue might be staying there. Although Dickerson couldn't provide twenty-four hour surveillance, he promised to have his men check the area as frequently as possible, and to alert the Coast Guard.

In the days that followed, Dana and Adam spent more time looking through the judge's things. Then they had dinner together, either at his place, or hers, or at one of the local restaurants. Afterward, they walked the beach, still looking for the mysterious man. They checked the lighthouse, too, and, as far as they could tell, no one had been there since they had. Everything on the little platform looked the same as it had when they'd first discovered it. Sheriff Dickerson had told them that, with the idea of trapping the intruder, the Coast Guard had allowed the person's belongings to remain.

One evening at twilight, as they strolled along the hard-packed sand near the judge's house, a huge fog bank rolled in. Soon the milky mist closed around them, mingling with the growing darkness, and Dana could see no more than a few feet in front of her.

"I hope we can find the path to the judge's," she said.

"Not to worry," Adam replied in his confident way. "I have a good sense of direction. But why don't we head back now? We're not likely to spot anything in the fog."

They turned around and started back. They had gone no more than a few feet when Dana heard the rumble of an approaching vehicle. She peered into the fog, but it was too thick to see anything.

"A car is coming," she said. "I can't see it, but he can't see us either."

"We'll get off the hard-packed track," Adam said. "Then we won't have to worry about it."

Headlights suddenly burst through the fog, blocking their path. They grew larger as the vehicle came

closer.

"Adam, look out!" Dana yelled.

Adam yanked her out of the way just as a large, dark-colored van roared by. Dana lost her balance. Dragging Adam with her, she fell headfirst into a tidepool. Cold salt water filled her nostrils before she could jerk her head up and out of the water. She dug her hands into the wet sand, struggling to rise. She slipped back onto her chest. Water trickled down the inside of her blouse, crept up under the hem of her jeans. She felt Adam grasp her shoulders. He pulled her up and turned her over, so that she could sit. The water was deep enough to make a pool in her lap.

"Are you all right?" he asked. He was on his haunches studying her with a concerned expression.

Dana coughed out some sea water, then reached up to push wet hair out of her eyes. "Yeah, just wet."

"Let's get out of here." Adam scrambled to his feet. As he reached down to help her up, Dana saw headlights loom out of the fog again, this time from the other direction.

"Adam, here it comes again!" she gasped.

Adam dragged Dana to her feet. They splashed out of the tide pool and began to run along the sand. Behind them, the van clung to their heels like an angry dog. Whenever they tried to head for the upper beach, it cut them off, forcing them to turn toward the water instead.

They splashed through more tide pools, their feet sending up sprays of water. Dana's soaked clothing clung to her body. Her breath came in short gasps. She didn't know how much longer she could keep on running. If Adam weren't clutching her hand, she'd be on her face in the sand.

More likely, she'd be under the van's wheels, she realized, with a sickening jolt.

Whoever was in that vehicle was really serious about running them down. A quick glance over her shoulder confirmed that it was a dark-colored van with tinted windows. Was it the same vehicle she'd seen from the boardwalk? The one with the rifle she'd thought was aimed at them? She managed to glimpse part of the license plate and saw the letters "HET." She repeated them over and over, hoping to embed them in her memory.

The van's engine roared with acceleration, and it charged forward. Dana realized there was no place for them to go except the ocean. Terror shot through her. Not the ocean, with all its traps and dangers.

"Jump!" Adam yelled, and took a flying leap into the surf.

Dana followed Adam. It was either that or be mowed down by the van. As it was, the vehicle's front fender grazed the back of her shins. They hit a huge wave, and her hand was torn from his. The wave sucked Dana under the water, swirling her around and around.

Finally, she surfaced. She spit out a mouthful of water, gulped in some air. Where was Adam? She looked around, saw only thick, milky white fog. A wave broke over her head, carried her toward shore. Then it pulled her back out again, except that this time she managed to keep her head above water. She flailed her arms, tried to swim, couldn't seem to remember how. Her clothing weighed her down. She felt like a big lump, unable to do anything but succumb to the sea's whim.

She kept looking for Adam. The fog cleared a little, and she spotted his head bobbing above the water. He seemed so far away. She managed to poke her arm in the air and wave. "Adam!" she called,

"Dana!" Her name carried faintly over the water. Thank God, he had heard her. He must be able to see her too, as he was trying to make his way toward her. It appeared to be a losing battle, though, because for each gain, a big wave would come and pull him farther away. She made a few swimming stabs in his direction, but then a wave washed her backward. If only she could anchor her feet to the bottom,

she might make some progress.

At last, her shoes touched the sea floor and stayed there enough for her to bobble along toward Adam. She was feeling pretty confident when the bottom suddenly dropped off, leaving nothing but water under her. She kicked her legs frantically, then water closed over her head.

* * * * *

"Dana!" Adam yelled. She had been only a few yards away, and now she was gone. He had to find her!

He dove under the water and managed to propel himself forward. He opened his eyes, but couldn't see anything other than a murky mixture of water and sand. He came up gasping for air. Went down again. This time his fingers grazed something. He lunged in that direction and ran into her. He managed to grasp her leg. Up. He had to get her up to air. And himself, too, as his lungs were near bursting.

With all his might he pushed them upward through the churning waves. At last he broke the surface. He held Dana's head in the crook of his arm, making sure her mouth and nose were above water. He couldn't see a thing in the fog, but the waves told him where the shore was. This time he didn't fight, but let them carry him and Dana in. He prayed they didn't get caught in an undertow, or a rogue wave.

It seemed to take forever, but at last a wave dumped them on shore like pieces of discarded driftwood.

Gasping and summoning every ounce of energy, Adam dragged Dana farther up on the sand. She was limp and lifeless, a dead weight. Her eyes were closed, her skin pale.

Oh God, he prayed, please don't let anything happen to Dana.

He turned her over on her back. Water trickled from her mouth. He arched her neck to start mouth-to-mouth breathing, but then she coughed and gasped. Her eyelids fluttered, remained open. Stared at him.

"Dana!" Relief made him weak. She was alive. Thank God.

"Adam . . . what"

"Shhh, save your energy for getting back to the house."

With her arm around his neck, he half-carried, half-dragged her up the beach. Then, his usually keen sense of direction failed him and he couldn't find the path. They wandered back and forth, the fog swirling around their feet like lazy wisps of smoke, until at last the opening in the dunes appeared.

Soon he was carrying her up the stairs to the deck and the front door. Inside, he hurried down the hall. "Got to get you in a warm shower," he said.

* * * * *

Minutes later, Dana stood in the shower, letting the warm water cascade over her. Even so, she was still shivering. It took quite a while before she began to thaw. When she finally decided she was warm enough, she pushed aside the shower curtain and stepped out. Her wet clothes lay in a heap where she'd left them. She grabbed the towel Adam had put out for her and dried off. He'd also left her a pair of his jeans, a shirt, and some socks before he went upstairs to use the shower there.

She felt odd and uncomfortable wearing his clothing, especially since she had no undergarments, but she had no choice. No way could she put her wet clothing back on. She climbed into the jeans and cinched the belt that was with them as tightly as she could. They would stay up, anyway. She picked up the shirt, noticing at once that it carried his scent. She held it to her face for a moment, then shrugged into it, rolling up the sleeves. The socks she could pull up enough so that they weren't too big. She rinsed her clothing and hung it over the shower rod. Spying a hair dryer, she plugged it in and began to dry her hair.

Later, Dana went down the hall to the living room where she saw that Adam had built a blazing fire in the stone fireplace. In the kitchen, she could hear the clink of dishes. She hoped Adam was fixing them something hot to drink.

She sat on the leather sofa and stretched out her legs toward the fire. Memories of what had happened on the beach filled her mind. Some were as hazy as the fog. She remembered the flying leap they had taken to avoid the van. She remembered seeing Adam's head bobbing in the waves, and the frantic, panicky feeling she'd had that he might drown. He'd been coming toward her. . . . things were vague after that. The water had sucked her down. She must have hit a crab hole.

She didn't remember anything else until she had come to on the beach, with Adam bending over her. He had saved her from drowning. As the realization of her near brush with death hit her, she started to shake.

Adam came in, carrying a tray of coffee cups and brandy snifters. "Ah, here you are. I thought I might have to come and rescue you from the shower." He grinned, then sobered as he peered down at her. "Seriously, are you okay?"

"Yeah. Just remembering."

Adam set the tray on the coffee table. He handed her a brandy. "Drink this and you'll feel better."

Dana took the snifter gratefully and savored the bouquet a moment before taking a sip. She let the brandy trickle its welcome warmth down her throat, then picked up one of the mugs of coffee and drank from it. "Great combination," she said.

Adam sat down beside her. "I thought it would hit the spot."

Moments of silence drifted by, while they enjoyed their drinks and the warmth of the fire. Then Dana said, "We were that guy's target, weren't we?"

"I'd say so," Adam said dryly. "I've never been chased into the ocean before. Not sure I want to be again either."

"It was a dark colored van with tinted windows, just like the one I saw from the boardwalk that day, with the rifle sticking out of the window. But this time, I got the letters from the license plate."

He glanced at her dubiously. "You're kidding."

"Nope. HET. I looked over my shoulder and saw them just before we jumped into the ocean. I couldn't see the numbers, though."

"Well, the letters are something to go on. I've already called Dickerson to report what happened--"

"You're so efficient."

He raised an eyebrow. "Umm hmm, but I'd better call him back and give him your input." He reached over to the phone sitting on an end table. He made the call, glancing at Dana, smiling a little now and then, while he talked to whoever was on the other end.

Adam hung up. "So, we reported it. That's the best we can do, for now. But I sure wish I knew why someone is after us. The guy in blue? Or someone else?"

"We just go 'round and 'round on this, don't we?" Dana said.

"Yep." He moved closer and put his arm along the sofa behind her.

Silence settled over them again. Finished with her brandy, Dana leaned her head back. As she did, Adam's arm dropped so that it was around her shoulder. The liquor flowed gently through her veins,

chasing away the last remnants of cold from her ocean nightmare. The fire crackled comfortingly, and Adam's arm around her made her feel safe and protected.

"Thank you for saving me from drowning," she said after a few minutes.

He looked down at her with solemn eyes. "You're welcome. You'd have done the same for me . . . wouldn't you?"

Dana remembered how frantic she had felt when she'd been unable to reach Adam out in the water.

"Yes," she said, "of course I would."

"Dana . . ."

She looked at him, saw on his face a mixture of tenderness, warmth and . . . desire.

Every nerve in her body answered the call she felt coming silently from him. And suddenly both his arms were around her and he was holding her close to him. "Dana!" His lips crushed hers. She kissed him back, clung to him. She had almost lost him out there in the ocean. But she hadn't, and he was here, warm and alive beside her. They were both alive. Thank God.

After a few minutes of frantic kissing, as if they had just discovered one another for the first time, they looked into one another's eyes and laughed.

Adam cupped her chin and closed his mouth over hers again, this time in a slow, heated way that melted her bones. With a deep groan he slid his tongue into her mouth, deepening the kiss.

At last he drew away, looked at her very thoughtfully for a moment, then reached up and began to unbutton her shirt.

"Adam . . ."

His fingers stopped working. "You want this, don't you?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Then stop worrying about it." One of the buttons popped free. He bent his head and kissed her collarbone, then finished unbuttoning the shirt. "No underwear. Of course not, it got all wet. . . ." He kissed the V between her breasts.

"Want to stay here or go upstairs?" Adam asked after awhile.

"Here. I like it by the fire."

"Me, too. But I've got to leave you for a minute . . . to get some protection."

"Hmm, I appreciate that, but does your being prepared mean you've been planning this?"

"Well, I didn't bring condoms on my trip with the expectation of having an affair with someone. I bought them after our night in the judge's apartment. I decided if it did happen between us, I wanted to be ready." He slanted a look at her. "Does that make a difference?"

"In our making love now? No, in fact, I think it's really thoughtful of you."

"Good." He grinned at her, tossed some of the sofa cushions onto the floor, then pulled her down onto them. "You stay right there. I'll be back in a minute."

Dana watched him leave the room, then stared into the fire. She could still back out of this, tell him she'd changed her mind. But she knew she wouldn't.

In a few minutes, Adam returned, and she held out her arms as he lay down beside her.

* * * * *

Much later, Adam gazed at Dana sleeping in his arms. Faint light from the dying fire cast intricate shadows over her face, her neck, her breasts. He now knew her as intimately as a man can know a woman. On the physical level anyway.

But what did it all mean? Did it mean he loved her? He knew he had some feelings for Dana, but he couldn't say how deep they went. He thought about their impromptu swim in the ocean. He remembered the tight feeling in his chest as he'd looked over the crest of the wave and seen her floundering. It was more than just concern for another human being; it was concern for someone who had become very important to him.

Remember what happened with Michelle, he reminded himself. And don't let your emotions get too involved.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Dana opened her eyes, blinked a few times, then focused on the ceiling above her. Large cedar beams stretched from wall to wall. She knew they were not part of her loft in Seattle, or of her condo in Ocean City.

No, this elegant ceiling belonged to the guest room at Judge Costain's beach house. She'd spent the night in this bed with Adam. Dana rolled over, saw that the other side of the bed, where he had lain, was now empty. She ran her hands over the indentations made by his body. The sheets were still faintly warm with his scent.

Dana rolled onto her back and looked at the ceiling again. She remembered making love in front of the fire. They'd dozed awhile, then finally picked themselves up and climbed the winding stairs to this bedroom.

The smell of frying bacon drifted into the room. Adam must be cooking breakfast for them. She'd better get up and go downstairs. But oh, what was she going to say to him? She knew now, in the cold light of day, that she'd done a stupid thing in allowing their relationship to go this far. It should have stayed on a professional level. A reporter didn't become romantically involved with a source. How many times had she been told that?

It wasn't just his being a source that made their lovemaking so wrong. He had a life in Sacramento, she in Seattle. But, most important of all, he had no respect for her profession, which was an integral part of her. No, they were too incompatible for anything lasting.

Dana sat up and put her bare feet on the black and white striped rug by the bedside, still mulling over their relationship. Maybe he hoped that by making love with her, he would ensure that she wouldn't write anything unfavorable about his father.

But that seemed far-fetched. The truth was a lot simpler. They were attracted to one another. They had finally given in to that attraction and made love. Period.

It was a mistake, but it had happened. Now, she had to pick up the pieces and go on from here.

Gazing around, she spied her clothing, that Adam had must have brought up, draped over a rocking chair. She went into the bathroom and washed up, then dressed.

When Dana entered the kitchen, she saw Adam standing at the stove. He looked fresh in jeans and a crisp blue shirt, sleeves rolled to the elbows. His black hair gleamed from a recent shower; his jaw was smoothly shaven.

He turned and looked at her as she entered the room. "Good morning." She tried to read something in his expression that would tell her his mood, but his face was inscrutable.

She debated whether or not to bring up last night and get it out in the open, or to leave it buried. She decided on the latter approach.

"Good morning," she said brightly. "What can I do to help?"

"It's all done except the eggs. Everything else is in the warming oven. Sit down and drink your juice." He gestured to the table.

Dana sat in front of one of the brown woven placemats he had laid out. She picked up the glass of orange juice and sipped it, grateful to have something to do. Adam returned to his cooking. She stared at his broad back, remembering the feel of those muscles under her fingers last night. Her gaze moved to his trim waist and hips . . . She swallowed hard and forced herself to look away.

They ate for the most part in silence. Dana felt awkward. She didn't know what to say, so she didn't say much of anything. He seemed withdrawn, which gave her another reason to regret what had happened last night. Had making love ruined everything between them? All the camaraderie, the trust? She thought it was supposed to be just the opposite, that lovemaking bound two people even closer than before.

What a mess she'd made of her assignment, Dana thought as a dismal cloud settled over her. James would be appalled if he knew. He would say this was even worse than when the dock workers ganged up on her. He'd say, and rightly so, that she had been stupid, stupid, stupid.

"I said, what are your plans for today?"

"Sorry, I was day dreaming. What are my plans? Why, I don't know." She wanted to say, My plans depend on your plans, but perhaps he didn't want her company today. "If you don't need me here for anything, I always have writing to do."

Adam took a sip of coffee, then said, "The truth is, I'm at a loss where to go from here. We've made a few discoveries--the guy in the picture, the keys, the intruder in the lighthouse--but nothing has panned out."

"Does that mean you're returning to Sacramento?"

"I don't know. But I can't stay here too much longer; I do have a job there to attend to. How about you?"

"Well, my two weeks are up, but James said he could probably grant me more time. I told him I'd use my vacation time, if necessary."

"He doesn't mind?"

Dana shrugged. "He's not crazy about the idea, but he's letting me have my way."

"Maybe we ought to leave the investigating to the sheriff, after all."

"Maybe." But Dana was sure Adam didn't really believe that.

When breakfast was over and they both had had enough coffee, Adam suggested he take Dana home. She nodded, feeling sick inside. Everything was going from bad to worse.

On the way to Ocean City, Dana tried to plan her day, but her mind felt like mush. When at last they reached the Gray Gull, she heaved an inward sigh of relief. In a few more minutes, she would be alone. Things were so tense between her and Adam that she really needed to be by herself for a while.

Adam pulled up to the stairs leading to her unit. Glancing around, Dana saw a familiar, older model car parked nearby. Glenda Jordan's car. It appeared as though she was staked out, waiting for Dana. She had probably been up to her unit, knocking on the door. "Oh, no," Dana murmured, but not soft enough to escape Adam.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I see Glenda Jordan's car. It looks as though she's been waiting for me."

"The reporter you told me about? Oh great!" Adam said through clenched teeth.

Good timing, Glenda, Dana thought. This was just what she didn't need right now.

The door to Glenda's car opened. She jumped out and ran toward them, hooded sweatshirt and baggy jeans flapping in the breeze.

Dana opened her door and alighted, hoping to head Glenda off. But Adam got out, too, and came

around to stand beside Dana.

"Oh, Dana!" Glenda called.

"Yes, Glenda?" Dana said.

Instead of answering, Glenda stared unabashedly at Adam. "You must be Adam Costain," she said, sticking out her hand. "I'm Glenda Jordan."

"Dana's mentioned you." Adam took Glenda's hand and half-heartedly shook it.

"I'm so sorry about your father," Glenda said.

But Dana detected a false note in Glenda's voice. That wasn't surprising, given what she knew about Glenda's brother, Fred, and Judge Costain.

Adam nodded.

"It's going to be great to interview you at last, Mr. Costain," Glenda said.

"Interview me!" Adam exploded. "Haven't you heard? I'm not granting any interviews."

"But hasn't Dana been interviewing you?" Glenda's plain face was all innocence. "It isn't fair for just one of us reporters to get the scoop."

"Miss Jordan, considering how the media distorts the facts, I hardly think you're in a position to decide what's fair. Furthermore, I don't care if it's fair or not. Come on, Dana, I'll walk you to your door."

Taking Dana firmly by the elbow, he led her toward the stairs.

As they climbed the stairs, Dana glanced over her shoulder. Glenda stood in the parking lot, hands on her hips, looking up at them.

Adam said, as Dana put her key in the lock, "Of all the nerve."

"She's just doing her job." Annoyed as she was with Glenda, Dana still felt compelled to defend her profession.

"She can do it somewhere else," he grumbled. "I wish you'd never spoken to her in the first place. You encouraged her. You can't give these people any encouragement. They're like leaches, they hang on and never let go until they get what they want."

Dana cringed at his harsh words. "Maybe you think I'm hanging on like a leach, too." She turned the key in the lock and shoved the door open.

He looked at her for a long, tense moment. "Maybe. Good-bye, Dana."

"Good-bye, Adam."

She watched out the bedroom window as Adam's Porsche roared from the parking lot. Her gaze scanned the lot, but neither Glenda nor her car was anywhere in sight.

Dana sank down onto the bed, both emotionally and physically exhausted. The scene with Glenda had been more than she could take.

Her spirits lower than they had been in quite awhile, Dana shed her clothes and crawled into bed. She pulled the covers over her head and tried to sleep.

She dozed for a couple of hours, then got up. After a hot shower and a toasted cheese sandwich, she went to her makeshift desk. She didn't really feel like working, but perhaps it would get her mind off her troubles with Adam.

She made an outline for her lighthouse article, and wrote a couple of sample leads. After a while, she

put that aside and turned to the piece about Judge Costain. There was a segment in the article where she wanted to quote from his speeches. She had the box of taped speeches Adam had given her, some of which she had listened to.

She remembered the tape real estate agent Tom Moser had promised to give her, of Judge Costain's speech to the Chamber of Commerce. That might come in handy now.

Picking up the phone, she called Mr. Moser. Fortunately, he was in, and yes, he had the tape. She told him she'd be right over. Fired up with purpose, Dana knew she was getting back to her old self, the reporter on the job.

Outside, Dana looked around the condo parking lot. She half expected to see Glenda Jordan's car, but thankfully it was nowhere in sight. As if worrying about the person who had run them down on the beach wasn't enough, now she had to worry about being harassed by one of her colleagues.

Dana found Tom Moser alone in his office. He wore his uniform of navy suit, white shirt, and maroon tie. The tie had a yellow spot on it that looked like egg. When they had dispensed with their greetings, he leaned back in his swivel chair and locked his hands behind his head. "So, how is your investigation going?"

"I'm not investigating," she reminded him. "I'm researching."

"Whatever." He waved a hand. "It's all a matter of semantics, isn't it?"

It wasn't, really, but she decided not to argue over his choice of words.

"I'm working hard on my article," she said in answer to his original question. "I didn't get back to you right away about the tape, because I've been busy with other research."

He nodded.

"Anyway, you said you have the tape?" she prompted.

He opened a desk drawer, took out a cassette tape in a plastic box, and handed it to her. "Here it is. I hope you can get some quotes from it. You'll credit the Chamber of Commerce, of course?"

"Of course."

Moser rose, came around his desk, and walked her to the door. "Heard there was a break-in at the judge's the other night," he said.

"That's right, there was."

"Heard the police were there investigating when you and Adam returned from a trip to Olympia."

The town's grapevine continued to amaze Dana. But how could even the town gossips know that she and Adam had attended Leona Sims's memorial gathering? Then Dana remembered the car she had seen pulling away from Judge Costain's Olympia apartment, that looked like Glenda Jordan's. If it was, had Glenda somehow passed the information on to Tom Moser? Were Glenda and Tom in on something together? Dana's head whirled with all the possibilities Mr. Moser's comment had suggested.

Moser's gray eyes focused on Dana as he waited for a reply. She decided to be as circumspect as possible. "Yes, the house was quite a mess."

"I haven't seen a security system yet that can't be busted into," he said.

"It's true they aren't foolproof," she agreed.

"So, what was missing?"

"You'd have to ask Adam about that."

"So something was gone?"

"I didn't say that. It's just that it's not my place to talk about it."

Why was he so interested? Could his probing have something to do with the alleged land deal kickbacks he and his former partner, Harold Franklin, were accused of?

"Why the big secrecy?" he asked.

"No secrecy, Mr. Moser; just discretion. I think it's a matter of word choice."

* * * * *

Back at her condo, Dana slipped the tape Tom Moser had given her into the tape recorder. Soon the judge's resonant voice filled the apartment. She closed her eyes and visualized the tall, white-haired man speaking to his Ocean City audience.

Although the topic of his speech was Justice in the 90s, the judge spoke as though there wasn't much justice these days at all. She heard frustration in his deep voice as he related story after story in which guilty criminals escaped punishment. Included was the account of Jurgen Manett. Dana perked up her ears.

"Manett was without a shadow of a doubt guilty," the judge said. "But because the search warrant that uncovered evidence was improperly obtained, I had to dismiss the case. It was one of the saddest days of my life."

Judge Costain didn't offer his audience many suggestions about how to rectify what he called "the abominable state of our court system" and the speech ended on a down note.

Dana snapped off the recorder. She wished she could have talked to the judge about his feelings regarding criminal justice. A personal interview would have greatly enriched her article. Now, she would have to make do with quoting from his tapes.

Dana played the tape again and incorporated some of his words into her article. Looking at what she had done so far made her sigh with her own frustration. She'd written only four pages of what was to be at least twenty or thirty.

She set to work again, but thoughts of Adam kept distracting her. It seemed such a long time since she had seen him, although it was only a few hours. She kept visualizing what had happened last night, being in his arms, making love with him.

Had they said good-bye for good this morning? Although to her that was unthinkable, she had no trouble believing that he could walk away that easily.

Finally, she shut down her laptop. This was no good. Maybe she'd have to return to Seattle in order to write the article. Maybe she'd have to be far, far away from Adam Costain before she could ever concentrate on her work again.

She could always call him to ask if he wanted to listen to the tape of the judge's speech to the Chamber of Commerce. But he hadn't cared about listening to all the other tapes, so why should he care about this one? He'd consider her call just an excuse to establish communication again.

No, she'd better let him be the one to call her.

If he ever did.

* * * * *

Adam flipped the computer off and leaned back in the swivel desk chair. He had taken the damaged

computer to an expert in town who'd been able to restore the contents of the hard drive. After picking up the machine this morning, he'd been searching the files, trying to find something that would help him understand what was going on. He'd found nothing, and staring at the screen for so long had given him a headache.

He rose and stretched, pulling at kinked muscles. Then he wandered into the kitchen and poured himself a cup of coffee. He could hear Marta running the water in the bathroom where she was cleaning. When she'd arrived this morning, she'd looked curiously at the dirty dishes from breakfast, that were obviously too many for only one person, but she didn't say anything.

He appreciated her discretion, but focusing on the dishes had made him think of Dana. In fact, he'd thought about her all day. The entire time he had been searching the computer, a part of his mind had been on her.

This morning, he'd wanted to withdraw from her. Running into Glenda Jordan had been annoying, but perhaps it was good that they had, for it served to remind Adam that Dana belonged to a group of people he had little regard for. That put even more distance between them.

The best thing for him to do would be to return to Sacramento. The investigation appeared to be going nowhere, and he couldn't stay away from work much longer. He had his career to think about.

It would be good to get back to architectural work again. Being involved with buildings was so much easier than relationships with people. Perhaps what he needed right now was to put this problem about the judge aside and do some designing. He had brought with him a briefcase full of sketches and ideas, thinking that he'd have time to look at them. Back then, he hadn't counted on having the judge's murder to contend with.

He went upstairs the guest room and took out the briefcase. He removed a small roll of plans and carried it downstairs. Instead of sitting in the office, he went outside to the round, wrought iron table on the front deck. The warm sunshine and fresh, salty air created a good work environment. He managed to concentrate on his drawings enough to make some modifications, but thoughts of Dana continued to plague him. This was ridiculous. He threw down his pencil and sat back in the chair.

He should call Dana. He didn't want her to think he was the kind of man who dumps a woman after he has sex with her. He had more sensitivity than that. But where did he want this relationship to go? He still didn't know the answer to that one.

So what'd you go and get this involved for? an inner voice challenged. He didn't have the answer to that, either. It was, simply, that he'd wanted her.

He still wanted her. Making love with her last night had satisfied that want only momentarily. Today the desire burned as brightly and as strongly as ever. Maybe even more so.

He rolled up his drawing and stuffed it back inside the cardboard tube. He went inside and headed for the telephone. Marta was coming down the hallway. She carried a box filled with cleanser and rags and scouring pads. A mop was tucked under one arm.

"Do you want me to fix you some dinner?" she asked.

Adam considered. If Dana wasn't busy, and hadn't decided to kiss him off, they might spend the evening together. "No, thanks," he said. "I have to go into town, and I'll get a bite there."

As Marta moved into the kitchen, Adam picked up the phone and dialed Dana's number. She answered it after the first ring. Had she been waiting for him to call?

"How's your day going?" he asked her.

"Fine. And yours?"

"Okay." Not true. He was miserable. "Dana?"

"Yes?"

"Do you think we should talk about what happened to us last night?"

"On the beach?"

How could she not know to what he was referring? "No, afterwards."

"Oh." A pause, then, "If you want to. But what happened is pretty simple. We've known we were attracted to one another. So, we finally gave in to it."

That sounded like something he should be saying. Pass it off casually. Don't make a big deal out of it.

"I don't think we should make too much out of it," she said, as though she had read his mind.

"No, I don't suppose we should," he muttered. Why did disappointment lay like a rock in his stomach? Wasn't that what he wanted, too? To pass off their intimacy as "no big deal"?

"You're right, but, I want to see you. I don't want to leave things between us on such a downer."

Me, neither. We can both be adults about this."

"What's your schedule for this evening? We could have dinner somewhere. . . ."

"I'm just working on my articles, as usual. Dinner would be fine."

"Good, I'll be over soon."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

On the way to Dana's, Adam stopped at a large grocery store he knew carried out-of-town newspapers. Since he had been in Ocean City, he had missed reading his hometown news. As he reached for a copy of The Sacramento Bee, his gaze fell on a row of tabloids hanging in racks above the other papers. One called The Eye leaped out at him. The cover showed a picture of the judge. The headline screamed, "Gangland Ties Lead to Superior Court Judge's Execution."

Adam's stomach coiled into a tense knot. He remembered the stories about his mother that he'd seen in the tabloids. How they had crushed her spirit. Now, the judge was the subject of someone's poison pen. Ordinarily, he wouldn't stoop to buy such trash, but he figured in this case he'd better find out what was in the article. He grabbed one of the magazines and carried it and The Sacramento Bee to the checkout stand.

The checker, a fresh-faced woman of about nineteen, paused to look at The Eye. "Ocean City is really on the map now," she said. "Judge Costain had a summer place here, you know. But he was murdered." "Is that so?" Adam kept his head down as he counted out his money, just in case she might somehow recognize him.

He sat in his car and read the article. The more he read, the angrier he became. The gist of the piece was that the judge was in league with gang elements who had then turned on him and murdered him. He read:

"A source close to the judge's son, Adam, said that a recent break-in at the judge's Ocean City summer home appeared to have been the work of gangs active in the area."

And later on:

"The sheriff's department is on the lookout for a mysterious man who was photographed at the scene of the judge's murder."

The writer of the article sure knew about what had been going on. Who did author of this piece of trash anyway? He looked for a byline, but didn't see any. But then, these tabloid articles rarely carried bylines. No one wanted to take credit. He'd bet they were not so shy about taking the payment for the article, though.

He went over the piece again. When he was finished, he came to the conclusion that only one person possessed the information to write it: Dana Merrill. No one else but Dana could have known all the information revealed in the article.

Adam tossed the magazine onto the seat. How could she do this? She had promised that everything they discussed was off the record. Then she wrote this anonymous piece of trash, capitalizing on the sensationalism of rumor and innuendo.

Adam started the car and roared out of the parking lot. To think that he'd been worried about her feelings after their lovemaking last night. To think that he hadn't wanted to hurt her. And look how she'd betrayed him. They were all alike, these media people. You couldn't trust any of them. He should have known better than to try.

At the Gray Gull, he skidded to a stop, grabbed the magazine, and jumped from the car. He took the steps to her condo two at a time and banged on the door. "Open up, Dana. It's Adam."

* * * * *

The banging on her door startled Dana. She had been trying to write while she waited for Adam. But since his call, work had been futile. Now he was here.

But why was he hammering on the door like that? And his voice sounded gruff, as though he were angry. He hadn't sounded angry when he'd phoned her earlier.

Still, her heart skipped in eager anticipation as she ran to let him in. When she opened the door, he barged past her. The fierce look on his face quickly chased away the smile she had ready for him. She saw that he clutched a tabloid-sized magazine.

He strode directly to her dining room table, where her work was spread out. He tossed the magazine onto the table. It skidded into a pile of papers and sent them flying.

"I see you've been doing some extra work, Dana. Did they pay you well for it?"

"What are you talking about?" Dana asked, genuinely bewildered. This certainly wasn't the way she had planned their meeting to go.

"This article," he said, pointing to the magazine.

Dana gasped when she saw the judge's picture on the cover. The Eye was one of the sleaziest of the tabloids.

"Your article," Adam said.

Dana picked up the magazine, opened it to the proper page and began to read. Good heavens, where had the writer obtained all this information? And how cleverly he or she had distorted it too.

"I didn't write this," she told Adam when she had finished reading. "I swear I didn't. How could you think such a thing of me?"

"You're a reporter, aren't you?"

"Yes, but not this kind of reporter. I've told you that before."

"I don't know why I ever believed you would keep your promise that our conversations were off the record," he said, ignoring her denials.

"I haven't written about anything we've discovered, Adam. Not yet. Most of the work I've done on my article has been background information I had when I came here. If you don't believe me, take a look at what's on my laptop."

Adam waved a hand. "Never mind."

Dana pointed to the sofa. "Sit down. Try to relax. I can understand why you're upset about this. It upsets me, too."

Adam sank onto the couch. He put his head back for a few minutes, then he raised up and looked at Dana. His eyes were dark with anger. "If you didn't write that article, then who did? It quotes a 'source close to Adam Costain.' That must be you."

Dana folded her arms and walked to the sliding glass doors. She looked out to the courtyard below where several guests were lounging around the pool. After a few moments of silence had passed, she said, "My guess is, Glenda Jordan wrote the article. Or at least contributed to it."

"How could she know all those things? I've never talked to her."

"But I have. Remember, I told you I had coffee with her one day? I tried to be careful what I said, but I guess I revealed more than I should have. I can see that some of the things I told her have been twisted around in the article." It was hard for Dana to admit that, but she had to be honest with Adam.

"But to imply that the judge was mixed up with gangs. . ."

"Remember, Adam, she has a motive for maligning your father's reputation. Your father sent Glenda's

brother to prison. There's something else, too"

"What's that?"

"She may have followed us to Olympia."

"What makes you think that?"

"I thought I saw her car parked on a side street when we left in the morning. I didn't mention it then, because I didn't want to upset you."

Adam blew out a frustrated breath. "Well, thanks a lot. How many more things are you keeping from me?"

"That's all."

He glowered doubtfully at her, then said, "I wish you hadn't had coffee with her."

"So do I, now. I guess I felt sorry for her. I fell for her line about wanting to make good. About being on her first job and all. I remembered what it was like to be just starting out. The pressure. The constant searching for sources and stories."

"Oh, come on, Dana. You people stick together. You're all alike. You'll do anything for a story. "

It was all Dana could do to keep her lips from trembling as she said, "Look, I'm sorry about this article. I don't like it any better than you do. When I see Glenda again, I'll tell her what I think about it. She'll deny writing it, though, and we can't prove she did. But what really hurts is that you would even think I wrote it. After all that's been between us. . . ."

Adam got up. She thought he was going to walk out the door, and her heart skipped a beat.

Instead, he came to where she stood by the glass doors. "You're right; I believe you when you say you didn't write it. I jumped to conclusions. You've been a big help to me, and I apologize for being so rotten just now. This wasn't the way I planned for this afternoon to go," he added in a low voice.

His sudden nearness left her breathless. "How did you plan it to go?" she asked when she could manage to speak.

"I planned to take you in my arms and kiss you. I planned to ask you to have dinner with me, to spend the evening together."

"And now?"

Adam reached out and ran a knuckle down her cheek. She shivered under his gentle touch. "I don't know," he said with a groan. "Last night . . ."

When he didn't finish, she finally prompted, "What about last night, Adam?"

"Last night, our being together felt so right."

"It did for me, too." She covered his hand with hers, gripped it tightly. There was so much she wanted to tell him, but was afraid to. Their relationship was as fragile as a spider's web.

"And now, Dana? What do you feel now?"

"I don't know. I guess I'm just as confused as you are. Even though you apologized just now--and I appreciate that--I know you don't approve of me, of what I am. But I can't change that. I am a journalist; it's in my blood. It's what makes me happy."

"I know you can't change what you are, Dana." He put his arm around her and pulled her close. She could feel his heart beating through the fabric of his shirt.

"But deep down, you don't approve. Do you?"

Adam stared pensively out the window for what seemed like a long time. "But don't you understand why I feel the way I do? I've certainly tried to explain it."

Dana's spirits sank. She had hoped that somehow, he would change his attitude toward her profession. "Yes, I do understand. And, yes, Glenda was wrong to twist the facts into that sorry piece of writing. But for every Glenda, there are dozens of responsible journalists. I count myself among them."

"So where do we go from here?" He reached up and threaded his fingers through her hair, fingered her silver star earring.

"Where do you and I go? That's up to you, Adam. We can go our separate ways. I can still work on my article. You can still investigate your father's murder."

"Is that what you want? To go our separate ways?"

She wanted to cry out, "No, of course not!" She wanted to tell him she cared for him in ways that went far beyond friendship. That she had to care, or she wouldn't have made love with him last night. But she wasn't about to let herself get hurt. Not now. Not anymore.

"It's up to you," she said, doing her best to keep her voice even.

"Okay, what if we went on as though last night never happened?"

"We could do that." But as she said it, Dana knew that would be impossible for her. She met his gaze, saw the doubt that clouded his eyes, and felt a twinge of satisfaction knowing he had difficulty, too.

"You probably don't need me anymore in your investigation," she said, attempting to send the conversation back to the judge's murder, a safer topic than their relationship.

"There's still the matter of identifying the person in your photograph," he said.

"We may never see him again," she pointed out. "He may be long gone by now."

"We should check the lighthouse to see if anyone has been there lately."

"Even with the sheriff's surveillance going on?"

Adam shrugged. "How effective is that? We know it isn't a twenty-four hour coverage. Why can't we check, too?"

"No reason," she agreed. "When would be a good time?"

"Tonight? We could have dinner, as I'd planned, then head for the lighthouse."

Dana didn't stop to ask herself if she really wanted to continue to work with Adam on his investigation. She knew she did. It had gone way beyond the search for a story. She knew that too.

* * * * *

Five days later, Dana drove to the judge's house for what had become her and Adam's nightly stakeout. They had kept watch for a couple of hours every night since their near break-up over the article in The Eye.

On that evening, they had walked along the beach, crept into the darkened lighthouse, and up the winding stairs to the third platform. The cot and the sleeping bag were still there. Newly crumpled bags from fast food restaurants and a few more cigarette butts in the metal can had told them the mysterious guest was still in residence.

Armed with blankets and a thermos of coffee, they had taken up a watch nearby. They stayed for a

couple of hours, but saw no one.

Nor had they seen anyone on subsequent nights. But they kept watch, anyway. There was really nothing else they could think of to do.

While they'd had no success as far as the mysterious man was concerned, they had learned a lot about one another. Adam told her more about his architectural work in Sacramento, and stories about his childhood, about his travels and being a "backstage kid."

"You never had the urge to follow your mother into show business?" she had asked him.

He shook his head adamantly. "Never. I saw what it did to her, and I didn't want any part of that."

When he asked her to share stories of her childhood, she told him how close she, her two sisters, and their parents had been, spending vacations together in places like Ocean City.

"You're lucky," he said. "I never knew that kind of family life."

Their sojourns on the beach could easily have led to more physical intimacy. However, they seemed to have put that part of their relationship aside. In its place, a friendship had emerged.

During the days, Dana worked on her articles. Adam continued to sort through the judge's papers, although he admitted he had nearly reached the end of his perseverance with that project.

For tonight, Adam had suggested they eat dinner at the judge's. "It's Marta's day to clean," he said. "We might as well have her cook us dinner. I'm in the mood for enchiladas, and she makes the best I've ever tasted."

"That sounds good," Dana had agreed.

Now, as she turned into the judge's driveway, Dana wondered just how much longer they would be able to keep up this schedule.

Adam confirmed her worries. After they had greeted one another, he said, "This may be our last stakeout. I heard from my boss today. He's got some new assignments for me. I can't put them off too long and still have a job."

"I can understand that," Dana said, but the thought of Adam's leaving pierced her heart with sadness.

Marta produced a wonderful dinner of enchiladas, quesadillas, and flan for dessert. Adam had even bought some Dos Equis beer for the occasion. But Dana had trouble swallowing around the lump in her throat, raised by the ever-present reminder that their time together was drawing to an end. It wasn't just losing Adam back to his work in California, although that was a good part of her regret. But also were the many unanswered questions about the judge's murder.

After dinner, Adam said, "It's still early. How about a walk on the beach before we settle down for our watch? We'll come back for our blankets and coffee."

"Good idea," Dana said. She picked up her navy windbreaker from where she'd tossed it on a chair.

"We'll be back soon," Adam told Marta as they went out the door. Then, to Dana, "You know, I just have a feeling we're going to get lucky tonight."

"I hope you're right," she said.

* * * * *

At the beach, Adam held Dana's hand as they trudged along. Although the sun still shone low in the sky, Dana noticed the air was crisper and colder than when she had first come to Ocean City, a sure sign that the seasons were about to change. She thought about all the walks they had taken on the beach

since they had met--they must amount to dozens--and felt sad again.

"I'm going to miss our walks on the beach," Adam said, as though he could read her thoughts.

Dana didn't want to talk about their parting, but felt compelled to keep up her end of the conversation. "Have you set a date for your return yet?" she asked, hoping her voice sounded casual.

"No, but, like I said earlier, it's got to be soon." A few moments of silence passed, then: "I want you to come and visit me sometime."

"Maybe."

But why? she wondered to herself. So they could have a night or two of sexual passion, only to part again? No, she was not going to put herself through that. Once Adam walked out of her life, he would be out of it forever. A heaviness settled over Dana. How was she ever going to get through the hours of their stakeout? She wished she could back out, but it was too late for that.

The sun was a large orange ball against a turquoise sky when Dana and Adam finally turned around to head back. They would spend some time at the house, then, when darkness had fallen, return to the beach with their blankets and other supplies.

They were about halfway to the path that led to the house when Dana saw a black-haired head bobbing along through the dune grass. She dug her heels into the sand and clutched Adam's arm. "Adam! I think that's our guy!" She pointed toward the dunes.

"Sure looks like it," Adam agreed.

"What now? If we try to follow him through the dunes, we'd probably lose him, like we did before."

"He's moving parallel to the beach," Adam observed, "following the same direction we're going. Wait a minute, now he's coming this way. . . . Get down."

Adam grabbed Dana's hand and pulled her behind a pile of driftwood. Peeking over it, Dana kept her eyes on the figure moving through the dunes. At last he burst from the underbrush and onto the beach.

"Come on," Adam said, "we've got him now." He scrambled over the driftwood and ran toward the figure.

Dana followed, stumbling over scattered wood. Her feet sank into the deep sand, making it difficult to gain much speed.

The man must have heard their approach, as he paused to turn around. Long dark hair whipped around his face, and wide, frightened eyes stared at them.

The man turned and started to run again, long legs leaping over logs and clumps of seaweed.

"Stop!" Adam called.

But the man kept on.

When the path to the house appeared, Dana saw their quarry swerve toward it. Why was he going there? she wondered. Didn't he know it led to the judge's house?

Just as the man turned onto the path, a shot rang out. Dana watched in horror as the man skidded to a stop. He teetered a moment, then doubled over and fell to the ground.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Adam yelled, "Get down, Dana!"

As Dana headed for the nearest pile of driftwood, something caught her eye. Turning toward the beach, she saw a dark-clothed figure running away. She hadn't noticed anyone on the beach before. Was that the person who had fired the shots?

Crouched behind the logs, Dana watched the figure disappear into the growing darkness. Anxious to know if Adam was all right, she cautiously peeked out from her hiding place and saw him behind another pile of logs a few feet away.

Adam looked over his shoulder at her. "Dana! Are you all right?"

"Yes." Dana darted out and ran up behind him. "We'd better check on our guy," she said. "He's down."

"I know, but be careful."

Keeping to the bushes, Dana followed Adam. Soon they were bending over the fallen man. "Why, he's just a kid," Dana said, looking at the youthful face. Blood trickled down his forehead from a head wound.

"Nineteen or twenty," Adam agreed. He hunched down and put his fingers under the man's wrist. "He's still got a pulse, but it's weak. We've got to get help. I hate to leave him here, but to drag him back to the house might injure him more. We'll just have to hurry back and call for help."

"I could stay here with him," Dana volunteered.

"No! I don't want you getting shot too."

"I saw a man run away just after it happened," she said. "It could have been the gunman. What if he comes back to finish the job?"

"That's exactly why I don't want you here. As for this guy, that's a chance we'll have to take. It's the best we can do under the circumstances."

When they reached the house, Adam ran immediately to the phone. Marta appeared from the kitchen, a can of cleanser in her hand. "What happened?" she asked Dana, a worried look on her round face.

"We may have found the guy I took the picture of," Dana said, as Adam began to spill out his story over the phone. "But someone shot him."

Marta dropped the can of cleanser. It bounced on the hardwood, then rolled away, leaving a trail of greenish dust. Her hand flew to her mouth. "Shot? Oh, no!"

"Yes, isn't it terrible?"

Dana thought Marta's response was a little strong when the man was only a stranger, but reminded herself that Marta seemed on the whole to be a very sensitive person. It was natural, then, that she might become upset upon hearing of the man's injury.

Adam hung up. "They'll be here as soon as possible. I told them where the guy is. They've been on the path before, they'll find him easily enough. C'mon, Dana, we'll go back and stay with him. I'll grab some blankets . . . Marta, what's the matter? Why has this upset you so much?"

Marta was wringing her hands. "I must go with you."

"Marta, really, there's no need."

"I must go," she insisted.

Adam looked at Dana. She shrugged. She did not know what was going on with Marta, but obviously it was more than met the eye.

Apparently, Adam did not want to argue with the housekeeper any longer, for he said, "Okay, then come along."

The blankets were the ones he and Dana had been using for their stakeout, so it took only a couple of minutes to get them, then the three of them left the house.

Adam took the lead, then Dana, with Marta following. Dana could hear her whispering a prayer as they hurried along the narrow path: "Mother Mary, please . . ."

At last they reached the young man. He lay just as they had left him, and his eyes were still closed. Marta took one look at him and began to sob. "Oh, no, oh, no," she moaned, twisting her hands together.

Adam gave Marta a long, hard look. "You know this young man, don't you, Marta?"

She took her eyes off the body long enough to focus on Adam. "Yes," she said, between sobs.

"Who he is?" he said gently, placing his hand under her elbow to steady her.

"He is my . . . my son, Ramon."

* * * * *

An hour later, at the Ocean City Hospital, Adam sipped from the Styrofoam cup of coffee provided by a volunteer, then pointed to the double doors leading to the Emergency Room. "If I don't see Marta in a minute, I'm going in there."

"It's hard to wait," Dana said. "I'm getting impatient myself."

Adam and Dana had followed the aid van to the hospital. However, being unrelated to Ramon, they were barred from the room where he was being treated. Marta had ridden in the van with her son and was still by his side.

At last, Marta pushed through the doors. Adam and Dana rushed to her side. Marta's anguish-filled eyes twisted Adam's gut. He put his arm around her shoulders. "Come, sit down."

With Dana on Marta's other side, they led her to a chair. Adam sat next to her, while Dana poured Marta a cup of coffee from the pot the volunteer had left. Marta kept her head down and wouldn't look at them, which made Adam fear the worst.

After a couple sips of coffee, Marta finally spoke. "They took Ramon upstairs to surgery."

Adam breathed a sigh of relief. Ramon had survived--so far, anyway.

Marta covered her face with her hands and began to sob. "He--he maybe die. The doctor say he's very bad."

"I know the doctors will do their best, Marta." Adam tried to convey a confidence he wasn't sure he felt.

Dana handed Marta a tissue from a box on the table. Marta dabbed at her eyes, then picked up the coffee and sipped it.

Adam said, "I know this is a terrible time for you, but it would help me and Dana a whole lot if you could tell us if Ramon was involved in the judge's murder. He sure looks like the man in the picture Dana took."

Marta raised her head. Anger flashed in her dark eyes as she looked at Adam. "My son did not kill your

father," she stated.

"I'm not accusing him," Adam assured her. "Please, just tell us what you know. You'll have to talk to the sheriff about it, anyway."

Several long seconds passed, then Marta said, "Judge Costain was helping Ramon."

"Helping him?" Adam echoed, surprised. That possibility had never occurred to him.

Marta nodded. "It all started one night when Ramon went to the Speedy Mart, out on the highway."

Adam nodded. "I know the place."

"Some men came and robbed the owner. Ramon hid and they didn't see him. Ramon recognized the men. They belong to a gang that they wanted Ramon to join. But he's a good boy, he goes to college, he wants to be somebody. He say no."

"That's certainly to his credit." Adam nodded his encouragement.

"Ramon told Sheriff Dickerson who the men are. The Sheriff say Ramon will be in their trial."

"As a witness," Dana put in.

Marta nodded. "But then the gang comes after Ramon, say they kill him, so he can't be no witness."

"And that's where the judge stepped in," Adam guessed.

"Si," Marta said. "Judge Costain tell Ramon he can hide in the lighthouse until the trial."

"How on earth did Judge Costain come to possess the keys to the place?" Dana asked.

"He told us he found them near there," Marta said. "That someone from the Coast Guard must have lost them."

"So Ramon hides in the lighthouse," Adam said, "and he just happened to be in the dunes when the judge was murdered."

"He was coming to see me," Marta said. "I buy food for him at the grocery. But I wasn't back yet."

Adam's heart thudded with excitement. "Marta, there's a good chance that Ramon saw the person who killed the judge, and can identify him. In fact, that may be why he was shot tonight."

Marta nodded glumly. "But I don't want him to tell. They'll try to kill him again. It don't pay to try to help."

Adam had to agree she had a point. "I'll bet when Sheriff Dickerson learns all this, he'll put a guard on Ramon's hospital room. If he doesn't, I'll personally hire someone to protect him."

"Gracias. Thank you." Marta dabbed at her eyes again, then looked at Adam. "Your father was good to Ramon. Treated him like a son."

Like a son. Unexpectedly, the words stabbed Adam in the gut. Why had the judge fathered others, like Len Chavinski and now Ramon, while ignoring his own flesh and blood son? Would he ever know the reason? Would the hurt ever stop?

It suddenly occurred to him that this was the first time he'd acknowledged that the judge's ignoring him had caused him pain. Before, he'd always told himself it didn't matter, that he didn't care.

Now, he knew it had mattered a lot. And it hurt a lot.

Perhaps acknowledging the pain was the first step to healing it. Healing it and going on with his life. But could he do that, after all the years of bitterness?

He glanced at Dana, saw she was gazing intently at him. He realized she'd picked up on his reaction to Marta's words. Understanding reflected in her eyes. He wished they were alone, so that he could share his feelings with her. He would, he promised himself, someday when this was all over.

"I'm inquiring about Ramon Lopez," Dana told the hospital nurse on the following day. She sat at her dining room table where she'd been working on her lighthouses article.

"I'll check," the nurse said.

A couple of minutes later, the nurse came back on the line. Dana listened to her message, thanked her, and hung up. Ramon was in the Intensive Care Unit. He had not regained consciousness after his operation. Dana was relieved he had survived, but being in a coma did not bode well for him. She supposed Marta was still at the hospital, along with her daughter, who had arrived before Dana and Adam had left last night.

She thought about calling Adam to see if he had spoken to Marta this morning and knew more than Dana had been able to glean from the nurse.

Before she could do that, the phone rang. It was Renee, the research assistant from The Seattle Review. "I finally finished your project," Renee said. "Sorry it took so long."

"No problem," Dana said. She'd given up on her theory, anyway, as being too-farfetched. "I'm sorry I sent you on such a wild goose chase."

"You didn't."

"What?"

"I found two other accused murderers, a Ralph Curelli and a Donald Holms, whose cases were dismissed on technicalities similar to Jurgen Manett's. And guess what, they're both dead."

Dana's heart beat faster. "Really? Give me the details."

"Curelli was gunned down as he left a tavern on Olympia's waterfront. Holms was shot in the woods near his home in Thurston County."

"Was anyone charged with the murders?"

"No, and there are no suspects, either."

"Okay, who were the judges presiding over Curelli's and Holms's cases?" Dana asked.

"Curelli had a woman judge named Leona Sims."

"Leona Sims!" Dana exclaimed. She had expected to hear that it was Judge Costain.

"Yeah. And Holms' was a judge named Burke. . . let me see, it's here somewhere."

"Burke Danforth," Dana finished.

"Right. How did you know?"

"He was a friend of Judge Costain's. So was Leona Sims."

"That could be significant."

"You're right. Thanks, Renee, you've done a terrific job."

Renee promised to fax Dana her entire report, then Dana hung up and immediately called Adam. They talked about Ramon for a few minutes, Dana learning he knew no more than she did, then she told him

Renee's news.

She said, "If somebody is murdering not only criminals who are let off, but also the judges who let them off, then Leona's and Burke's lives are in danger."

"Or it could be coincidence," Adam said.

"Do you really think so?" Dana couldn't help but be disappointed that he wasn't as excited about her idea as she was. "I know it's a wild theory, but I've been right, so far."

"That's true," Adam admitted. "I guess we owe it to Leona and Burke to alert them. I'll give Leona a call and get back to you."

Half an hour later, Adam called back. "We have an appointment to meet with Leona and Burke tomorrow at two p.m., at her apartment."

"Did you tell her the details?"

"No, I just told her we have a theory about the judge's murder that we wanted to discuss with her and Burke. Will you have Renee's report by then?"

"It just came over the fax. I'll make copies for you, and for Leona and Burke."

"Good. I'll pick you up tomorrow around noon."

Noon tomorrow. A whole twenty four hours from now. Dana wondered what he was doing this evening, but didn't ask. "Okay, I'll be ready. And Adam--"

"Yes?"

"I have a feeling this is all going to be resolved very soon."

"I hope you're right."

* * * * *

"So, that's Dana's theory," Adam said. He sat back on the sofa and looked expectantly at Leona Sims and Burke Danforth. He and Dana had just finished telling the two judges everything, including the part about Ramon hiding out in the lighthouse.

Being here reminded Adam of the judge's memorial gathering, except that he felt more comfortable today. The judge's portrait was missing, and he didn't have those penetrating eyes gazing at him.

He thought how stern Leona looked, dressed in a tailored navy pants suit, her dark hair pulled into a bun at the nape. She was such a contrast to the Art Deco women who adorned her apartment, anorexic figures in slinky dresses hugging equally skinny wolfhounds.

His gaze shifted to Burke, slumped in his chair like a sad-eyed beagle. Adam could picture Leona as a judge, but not Burke. He seemed too quiet, too withdrawn to issue pronouncements to a courtroom. But perhaps he changed once he donned the black robe and climbed behind the bench.

Leona finally spoke, bringing Adam back to attention. "I'm so shocked by all this that I've been sitting here speechless," she said with a dry laugh. "Not a state I usually find myself in." She turned to Burke. "What do you think?"

Burke leveled his sad gaze on Adam. "I hate to think it, but you two might have stumbled onto something." Burke reached up to smooth his thinning hair. "On the other hand, maybe whoever shot Bob shot him by mistake when he was aiming at this Ramon fellow. Did you ever think of that?"

"No," Adam said. "But it seems unlikely, since the judge was shot twice, and in the back."

"Plus, the judge in no way resembles Ramon," Dana pointed out.

"It's still a possibility," Burke insisted. "But even if Bob's murder wasn't a case of mistaken identity, his killer may not be associated with Jurgen Manett. Judges make a lot of enemies."

"We get threats all the time," Leona said.

"And you don't do anything about them?" Adam asked.

Leona shrugged her slender shoulders. "What's to do? I guess I could hire a bodyguard, but that would look kind of silly in the courtroom. We just live with it."

"So you're not worried that you might be a target of whoever's doing all this killing?" Adam asked.

Burke leaned forward from his chair. "I didn't say that. If it's true, it's a pretty serious situation."

Dana spoke up. "I bet if you checked on it, you'd find the same kind of bullets were used in each shooting."

Leona exchanged a look with Burke. "We could have Len Chavinski look into it," she said.

Burke nodded. "Sure, let's have Len do that."

* * * * *

Afterward, Adam and Dana stopped at a roadside restaurant for dinner. As they waited for their turkey sandwiches to arrive, Dana asked Adam, "So, what did you think of Leona's and Burke's reaction?"

"They seemed to take it seriously. I hope nothing happens to them."

"Me, too," Dana said.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Adam stuffed the letters and other papers he had been looking at into their accordion file and slid the file onto the desk. He sat back and folded his hands behind his head. He was tired of going through the judge's papers. The man seemed to keep every piece of correspondence he had ever received, even the most insignificant.

Three days had passed since he and Dana visited Leona and Burke. He'd heard nothing from them, and therefore didn't know if they'd contacted Len Chavinski or anyone else about Dana's theory.

Dana. Her image popped into his mind. He supposed she was working today, as usual. They'd quit their stakeouts, of course, now that they knew the mystery man's identity. Poor Ramon was still in a coma. Adam was relieved that Sheriff Dickerson had assigned a deputy to guard the young man's hospital room. When the shooter learned Ramon was still alive, he might try again to kill him.

Marta had told Adam and Dana that word of Ramon's condition had reached his father, and that yesterday he showed up at the hospital. It appeared as though the tragedy might bring about a family reconciliation, which meant at least one good thing would come of it.

The phone rang. Adam picked it up, hoping it was Dana. He wanted to get together with her for dinner this evening.

But it was Leona Sims's voice that he heard when he said hello. They dispensed with greetings, then Leona said, "Burke and I talked to Len, and he thinks your theory is worth pursuing. He's got some ideas about how to proceed."

"Great. What are they?"

"They're too involved to go into over the phone, I'm afraid. Are you free for dinner this evening? I'm going to be passing through there on my way to Seaside to spend a few days with a cousin."

"I'm available. I think Dana is, too."

"I'd rather it'd be just the two of us, Adam. There are some other things I want to tell you about your father. Personal things."

"Well . . . okay, just the two of us, then."

"Good. I'll be there around four."

Adam hung up, puzzled by Leona's call. What personal things did she know about his father? Something to do with the possible love triangle between her and the judge and Burke? Something that would throw light on the murder? But if that were the case, why hadn't she mentioned it before this?

He dismissed that idea. Probably, she just wanted to tell him little, insignificant things that she thought he'd be interested in.

He was disappointed that Dana wasn't included. He'd hoped to see her this evening. But perhaps after Leona had left, the two of them could then get together.

There was one accordion file left to go through. Adam eyed it for several minutes, debating whether or not to take the time. He might as well, though; then he'd be through with these files that he found stuffed in the back of the office closet.

Picking it up, he dumped the contents onto the desk. He studied the return addresses on the envelopes. Most of them were charities. He quickly glanced through their contents. Nothing interesting, as he had expected.

The last thing in the file was a manila envelope. It too, was full of letters. He poured them out, noticing

that many of them were unopened.

He did a double take when he saw that they were addressed to him.

How could that be? He picked up one and stared at it in disbelief. Yet there was his name, Adam Costain, and the address where he and his mother had been living in Italy. The return address said Robert Costain. "Return to Sender" had been stamped across the front.

Adam was stunned. He had never received a letter from the judge, yet here were at least a dozen that had been sent to him. What was going on? He tore open one envelope.

The letter was dated some fifteen years ago. "Dear Son," it began. Dear Son?

Adam read on:

I hear that you have been doing very well in your school studies. I'm proud of you. I also understand that you have been traveling some with your mother.

I do wish, though, that you would reconsider about seeing me. I know it's been a few years since I have attempted to contact you. I regret that, and now would like very much to get together.

But your mother keeps telling me, through her lawyer, that you refuse to see me or to even read my letters. I am sorry that I have made you so unhappy. Perhaps we could start again?

I do hope you will read this letter and write to me.

Love, Dad

Adam sat back, his heart pounding. It was a good thing there was no one here to talk to, because right now, he was sure he was speechless. He had never dreamed that his father had wanted to see him or had written to him, not once but many times. He had never seen or been told about any of these letters.

When the numbness of shock wore off, he decided to read all of the letters. First, he arranged them in chronological order, then he began to read.

Half an hour later, he pieced together what must have happened. His mother had told his father that Adam did not want to have anything to do with him, while she had told Adam the same thing about his father.

Why? Thinking back, he remembered his mother being very bitter and unhappy about her divorce from the judge. When he was old enough to understand, she told Adam that the judge did not want her to be an actress; he thought it detracted from the dignity of his own profession. He wanted to control her, tell her what to do, where to go, whom to be friends with. Everything had centered around him and his goal to be a judge.

Adam thought hard about those early days after the divorce, when his mother had whisked them off to Italy. And he remembered something that had been deeply buried. His mother had told him six months or so after they arrived, that his father wanted to see him. But he had cried and carried on that he didn't want to. His father was a stranger. A stranger that he'd heard bad things about from his mother.

His mother must have taken that one situation and used it repeatedly whenever his father wanted to come around.

Still, she could have given Adam his letters. She must have been afraid they might change Adam's mind. Very probably, they would have.

He now saw that he had been a pawn in the conflict between the judge and his mother. Both had been

at fault.

And he, Adam, had been the big loser.

He thought about all the lost years and felt utterly sick inside. Lost years that the judge had wanted to make up. That was why he had wanted to see Adam now. He wanted to explain what had happened. Show him the unopened letters.

But now the judge was dead. They'd never be able to sit down together and get everything straightened out. Never be able to say "I'm sorry" to one another, or "Let's start over."

The loss that Adam felt overwhelmed him. He put his head in his hands and wept.

* * * * *

At her condo, Dana labored over the article on the judge. She knew she couldn't spend much more time here in Ocean City. She was already on the second of her two weeks of vacation time. She would have to return to Seattle soon, even though the judge's murder was still unsolved.

James would expect her to have an article on the judge. Not just any old article, but something outstanding. As Dana read over what she had written, she realized how lacking in substance the piece was. She couldn't even make it an open-ended, who-dunnit kind of article, since she couldn't use anything she and Adam had turned up. Nor could she include anything about the judge's and Adam's alienation, as she had learned that only from Adam.

She sighed in frustration. This was a mess. A mess that very well could cost her her job.

The only resource she had left, that she hadn't completely explored, was the box of the judge's speeches. She might as well listen to all of them. Maybe they would provide her with an idea or two.

As she listened to them, Dana noted how down on the criminal justice system Judge Costain had become. The early tapes showed him full of confidence about criminals being brought to justice and being punished for their crimes. But in the later speeches, he sounded less and less positive about it.

Dana assumed that after years of seeing criminals go free on technicalities, and witnessing juries being manipulated by defense attorneys who were serving their own ends rather than those of justice, he had become a bitter man.

That was too bad, Dana thought, because he seemed to be a good judge, fair and impartial, yet not afraid to impose strict sentences when the crimes warranted them.

She wondered what it would feel like to become disillusioned with one's profession. She remembered how starry-eyed and idealistic she had been as a journalism student. She'd wanted to change the world with her pursuit of the truth.

Perhaps she was less idealistic these days, but she still believed in what she was doing.

The judge, however, had been compelled to make decisions he didn't want to make, that he didn't believe in. His hands were tied by laws others had made.

That must have been very frustrating for him, Dana decided.

While she was searching through the tapes, Dana found an unmarked one at the back of the box, that she hadn't noticed before. Although it probably was blank, she decided to check it just to be sure.

She put the tape into her cassette recorder, turned it on, and immediately heard the judge's voice. So, this must be another speech. But no, there were other voices, too. Loud background noise made it difficult to understand what they were saying. Dana turned up the volume until the words became clear.

As she listened, her eyes grew wide and her heart began to pound. She could hardly believe what she was hearing. She listened to the tape again, gradually piecing together what it was about.

By the time she had heard it a second time, she was pretty sure she knew not only why Judge Costain had been murdered, but by whom as well. Shock waves rippled through her, then excitement quickened her pulse. What a story this would make! Her fingers itched to sit down at her laptop and start writing.

Then a thought hit her like a splash of cold water. She couldn't write this story for publication before the police were informed. In addition was Adam's request that he approve of anything she wrote about his father.

She had to let Adam hear the tape. She owed it to him. Then they would take it to Sheriff Dickerson.

But what if Adam didn't want to turn it over to the sheriff? What if he didn't want her to write about what she had found out? In fact, Dana was sure that would be the case.

This was what she had been afraid of at the very beginning, when she had agreed to talk to Adam off the record. Although the tape presented a different situation, Dana knew Adam would be furious with her if she used any of it without his knowledge or approval.

Besides, what it contained would be very upsetting to him, to say the least. Yet, she must share it with him. Then they would decide what to do next.

She looked at her wristwatch. Four-fifteen. Praying Adam was at home, she picked up the phone and dialed the judge's number. She got the answering machine's recorded message.

"Adam, this is Dana," she said when the message was over. "I've found something on a cassette tape that solves the judge's murder. It's just incredible! Call me as soon as you can."

After she hung up, Dana was too jumpy to work any more. She couldn't think of anything other than what she had heard on the tape. Perhaps she should call Sheriff Dickerson herself. But no, she must let Adam hear the tape first. It was, after all, his property and his father.

She phoned him again, and got the answering machine. "Adam, call me ASAP!" she barked into the receiver.

As five o'clock rolled around, Dana was so nervous she decided to go for a walk on the beach. She made sure her answering machine was on, in case Adam called, before grabbing her windbreaker and heading out the door.

When she arrived at the beach, Dana noticed that the wind was blowing harder than usual, and that dark clouds huddled on the horizon. Even as she watched, the clouds drifted closer, signaling a change in the weather. Unless she was badly mistaken, before the evening was over, Ocean City would be deluged with rain.

As she trudged along, hands in her pockets, head bent against the wind, she thought about Judge Costain and what she had heard on the unmarked tape. The story seemed so incredible that now Dana wondered if she'd put it together correctly. Perhaps when Adam heard the tape he'd come up with a different scenario.

When Dana returned to her condo, she found a note sticking in the door. She unfolded it and read:

Hi Dana,

Got your message. Meet me at the lighthouse at 8:00 tonight. I have reason to believe there is new evidence to be found there. Bring the tape with you.

See you then.

Adam

New evidence at the lighthouse? Dana's heart pounded with excitement. What could it be? Evidence that supported what she had heard on the tape?

Dana was disappointed that she and Adam would not be meeting right away, but she would honor his request to wait until eight o'clock.

Time crawled by. Dana was by far too nervous to do any more work. She ate dinner in front of the TV, although she was barely aware of the programs. At seven, she shrugged into her jacket, gathered together everything she needed, and left the condo. The black clouds she'd noticed earlier on her beach walk now hovered overhead, ready to dump their rain. This was not a good night for a visit to the lighthouse.

As Dana pulled out of the parking lot, she thought she saw Glenda Jordan's white compact huddling behind one of the condo buildings. She quickly backed up to take a better look. When she saw no car, she decided her nervousness was making her see things that weren't there.

Dana decided to park her car at the judge's house and walk to the lighthouse by the beach route she and Adam usually took. She remembered the road that led there from the highway, but decided tonight was not the time to try something new.

By the time she reached the judge's, rain was pattering the windshield. The house sat in darkness, except for the porch light, a yellow beacon shining down on the redwood deck. The rain and darkness made the tall trees look like eerie giants.

Adam's Porsche was nowhere in sight. Apparently, he was still out on whatever errands he'd had to do today. Perhaps she should wait for him so that they could go to the lighthouse together.

However, he might not come to the house first; he might take the road through the woods to the lighthouse instead. She didn't want to be waiting for him here while he was waiting for her at the lighthouse.

No, she'd better follow the instructions in his note. She stashed her purse under the front seat and fished around in the glovebox for a flashlight. She raised the hood to her jacket and tightened the strings under her chin. Then she got out of the car and locked the door.

Cold rain pelted her and the wind flattened her to the car until she could get her balance. Keeping her head bent against the wind, using the light to help her, she made her way around the house to the beach path.

At last she came to the beach and began the long trek to the lighthouse. She raised her head long enough to gaze at it, momentarily reassured by its beacon reflecting across the water.

As she plodded along, she began to doubt the wisdom of following through with Adam's request. Certainly, whatever he wanted to look for in the lighthouse could wait until tomorrow when this storm had passed.

However, now that she'd come this far, she wasn't going to turn around and go back. She left the beach

and trudged up the hill to the bluff on which the lighthouse sat. Only a short way remained to go. Thank goodness she was almost there. Despite her waterproof jacket, she felt damp and clammy inside. Perhaps she and Adam could build a fire in the lighthouse's potbellied stove and dry off.

The door to the lighthouse stood ajar. Good, that meant Adam was already here. She pushed it open, saw a darkly clad figure standing before the stove, where a fire crackled. The person's back was to her. Her breath caught in her throat. Suppose it wasn't Adam?

It was too late to back away. The person had heard the door edge open. He swiveled around. Dana's throat constricted . . . then relaxed as she recognized Adam's familiar features.

"Dana!" He rushed over, put an arm around her shoulder, and drew her inside. "You're here at last."

"Yes, am I late?" Dana untied her hood strings and pushed it off her head, brushed away the damp locks of hair from her forehead. "I timed my trip to arrive at eight, just as you instructed. I brought the tape, too. . . . What's the matter? Why are you looking at me so strangely?"

"You said you planned to get here when I instructed, but, Dana, you were the one who wanted to meet me here."

Dana stared at him. "What are you talking about? You stuck a note in my condo door, asking me to come to the lighthouse tonight, because you thought there was new evidence here."

Adam shook his head. "No, I got a similar note from you, saying that you wanted to look for new evidence. I've been with Leona Sims since four. She came to town and wanted to have dinner. We did, and I left her just in time to get here to meet you."

"I didn't write any note, Adam," Dana said.

"I didn't, either."

"Then this is a set-up." Dana swallowed hard. All of a sudden the air around them hummed with danger.

"We'd better get out of here," Adam said, taking her by the elbow.

But before they could take a step, Dana heard movement from the shadows underneath the stairs. She swiveled around just as a figure edged into view. Light from the stove's fire glinted on a gun.

"Stay where you are," a voice commanded.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Dana peered at the figure. It was someone dressed in black, with a watch cap drawn low over the forehead. Her heart thudded wildly. Who was it?

Then the person stepped closer, and light from the fire illuminated a jowly face set with large, sad eyes.

Dana gasped. "Burke!"

"Burke?" Adam echoed. "What--?"

"Shut up!" Burke Danforth commanded, then yelled toward the open door, "Leona! You out there?"

Leona Sims slipped inside the lighthouse. She wore a long, hooded raincoat that flared around her ankles like a witch's cape. One hand held a small caliber pistol.

"Leona," Adam said in a bewildered tone, "I thought you were on your way to your cousin's?"

Leona pushed back her hood and smoothed wet tendrils of her dark hair away from her forehead. "No, Adam; there is no cousin. That was an excuse to see you. Although you could have picked a better night for this," she grouched to Burke.

"We didn't have much choice," Burke muttered. "Dana found the tape."

Adam turned to Dana. "Do you know what this is all about?"

"I think I do," Dana said slowly.

"So you figured it out," Leona said.

"Yes," Dana said. "Want to hear my theory?"

"Why not?" Leona said.

"Okay, there was no conspiracy against you and the criminals you had to set free, was there? You and Burke and Judge Costain are the conspiracy. You plotted to have Jurgen Manett and the other two men murdered."

"That can't be true!" Adam protested.

Dana laid a hand on Adam's arm. "I'm sorry you had to find out like this, Adam, but it is true. The three of them decided to take justice into their own hands. Isn't that right?" She looked from Burke to Leona for confirmation.

Burke just looked at Dana with his sad eyes, while Leona paced the room. Then she whirled around to face Dana. "You can't imagine what it's like to have to set a criminal free, knowing he's guilty. Yet we've done it time and time again. I can't sleep nights knowing the scum that's walking the streets."

"So the three of you decided to take the law into your own hands?" Adam still sounded as though he didn't believe it.

"The law!" Burke spat out. "Most laws in this country are a joke."

Adam said dejectedly, "So, it is true. Okay, so who did the dirty work? Did you do it yourselves?"

"They hired a hit man," Dana said.

"I see. But why was the judge killed?"

"Because he wanted out." Dana turned to Leona and Burke. "Right?"

"We never should have included Bob in the first place," Leona said. "He didn't have the guts. After Manett was taken out, Bob got cold feet."

"So you had your hit man target him," Dana said. "You knew the judge had evidence about what you'd been doing, but you didn't know what it was. You planned to search his beach house afterward and find it. But you didn't count on Ramon witnessing the killing, or on Adam and me being here."

"Then you had your hit man try to scare us off by breaking into my condo and Adam's motel room, stalking us on the boardwalk, and running us down on the beach. The night we stayed in Olympia, you two broke into the beach house and searched it. I'm guessing it was you instead of your man, because you wanted to find the evidence yourself. If he found it, he might blackmail you."

Dana rolled on as all the pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place. Besides, stalling gave her and Adam time to think of some way to escape.

"And Burke wrote the note tonight that I thought was from Adam. You were probably searching the beach house again while Leona kept Adam busy. Then you tricked us both into coming here."

Burke stepped forward and motioned with his gun. "Cut the talk, Dana, and hand over the tape to Leona. I heard you tell Adam you brought it."

Dana stared stonily at Burke.

"Give the tape to Leona," Burke repeated. "Otherwise, Adam will be joining his father." He aimed the gun directly at Adam's head.

Dana gasped. If there had been any question in her mind whether or not these two meant business, it was gone now. She slid her hand into her jacket pocket.

"Slowly," Burke warned. "No tricks."

Dana pulled out a cassette tape and handed it to Leona. "How do you know we don't have a copy?" Dana said, sticking out her chin defiantly.

"Because you didn't have time to make one," Burke said. "You only discovered it this afternoon. Throw it in the fire, Leona," he commanded.

Keeping her gun trained on Dana and Adam, Leona edged over to the pot-bellied stove. The cast-iron door creaked as she opened it and tossed the tape inside. Dana watched with a sinking feeling as flames dissolved the plastic casing.

"That takes care of that blasted tape," Burke said.

Now, what was going to happen? Dana wondered. Would they let her and Adam go?

Burke and Leona exchanged looks. Burke nodded, then turned to Adam and Dana. "Okay, up the stairs, the both of you."

"You're going to kill us, too, aren't you?" Dana stated. She still hoped that buying time with chatter might enable her and Adam to escape.

"You're going to have an accident," Leona said.

Burke motioned with the gun. "Upstairs."

"It won't work," Dana said, thinking fast. "Ramon has come out of his coma. He's given the sheriff a description of the man he saw shoot the judge."

"That's right," Adam said, catching on to Dana's ploy. "Marta called me with the news earlier today."

"And, the sheriff tracked down your hit man's van," Dana said. "It won't be long before he's in custody."

I bet he'll talk."

"He'll have nothing to say," Burke snarled, "because he doesn't know who hired him. It was all done anonymously."

Dana hadn't counted on that. For the first time since this nightmare had begun, her courage began to fail her.

"Upstairs!" Burke commanded.

Leona moved around behind Adam and Dana, while Burke covered them from the front. There was nothing for Adam and Dana to do but start walking toward the stairs. Every step Dana took seemed weighted with lead, yet somehow she managed to propel herself forward.

When they reached the stairs, Burke began to back up them while keeping his gun aimed at Dana and Adam. "Start climbing," Leona commanded. She prodded Dana, then Adam in the back with her gun. Dana clung to the ice-cold railing and forced herself to climb the iron steps.

They must have made a curious procession, Dana thought, with Burke in front, walking backwards, and Leona in her long witch's coat, prodding with her gun from behind.

Adam reached forward and grasped her hand. His touch seemed to say that, somehow, they would escape. But Dana had no idea how.

They came to the first landing, trod across it, and kept climbing. The second landing went by, and the cold, gray lighthouse walls narrowed, closing in on them. The third landing appeared. All traces of Ramon's occupancy were gone, removed by the sheriff and his men. Next was the light room. What then? Dana wondered.

But deep inside, she knew.

Even through the thick walls they could hear the wind howling like a hurricane. Dana's heartbeat thudded in her chest, and her throat felt gritty. She glanced over her shoulder at Adam. His mouth was set, his chin held high. He hadn't given up. Well, neither had she. They'd figure out something.

At last their little procession reached the light room. The heat from the enormous light made Dana feel like she had entered the tropics. And after the darkness of the stairs, it nearly blinded her.

"You take her out first," Burke said to Leona.

Leona nodded, and motioned to the door that led outside to the gallery. Dana wanted to look at Adam again, to see if he had some signal for her, but she didn't have the chance. Leona's gun shoved her hard toward the door. As Leona reached around to open it, wind and rain slapped Dana in the face.

"Go on!" Leona commanded.

Her heart hammering, Dana stepped onto the walkway. She guessed Leona was going to push her over the waist-high railing.

Dana glanced at Leona and the gun. Was there a chance she could overpower the woman? She had no doubt that if provoked, Leona would shoot her. These two were desperate to protect themselves and their sick scheme. But the commotion might be enough to distract Burke and allow Adam to gain control of him. But what if Adam was shot?

Dana didn't know what to do.

"Start walking," Leona yelled over the howling wind.

"Walk?" Dana looked at Leona in disbelief. The hard look on the woman's face indicated that was

exactly what she wanted Dana to do.

Dana edged away from the windowed wall of the lighthouse, half-expecting Leona to shove her over the side. But nothing happened. Hanging onto the wet railing, head bent into the wind, Dana shuffled forward. The rain pelted her face, making it difficult to see. Her feet sloshed through little puddles that dotted the walk's uneven surface.

They reached the ocean's side of the walk where waves crashed onto the rocks. Would this be the place? Her body washed out to sea, never recovered? Was that what Leona and Burke planned for her and Adam?

But Leona made no move to push Dana over the side, and soon they were back where they had started. She heard Burke yell something that sounded like "Get on with it."

As they started around the second time, Dana wondered if Leona might be having second thoughts about her and Burke's plan. It was one thing to hire a hit man, but another to do the job herself. Perhaps she just didn't have the guts.

When they reached the side of the lighthouse that faced inland, flashing lights drew Dana's attention. Looking below, she saw what appeared to be vehicle headlights. Smaller beams, like lanterns and flashlights, jiggled and bounced along too. People were down there. Perhaps she and Adam had a chance to survive yet.

Dana began to walk faster. As soon as she reached a place where she was sure those below could see her, she would start yelling, no matter what Leona might do to stop her.

Just then, her foot landed in a puddle of water. She slipped, and her feet flew out from under her. Her bottom hit the cement with a painful thud.

Leona pounced on her like a lioness on a mouse. She kicked Dana viciously, pushing her into one of the wide holes underneath the railing. Dana's legs went over the edge. As her bottom met the end of the walkway, she grabbed the railing post with both hands and hung on with all her strength.

The sound of a gunshot from inside the light room pierced the roar of the storm. Oh God, she hoped Adam wasn't hurt!

Leona managed to shove Dana completely over the side. Miraculously, Dana kept her grip on the railing post. She dangled in air, twisting and turning, kicking her legs frantically. Her arms felt as though they would be pulled from their sockets.

Leona, her face contorted with her evil purpose, kicked at Dana's hands. The toes of Leona's shoes bit into Dana's flesh. Still, Dana kept her hold on the post. Her legs dangled uselessly now as the wind swung her back and forth like a clock's pendulum.

Vaguely, she was aware that the voices and lights below had come closer. But that wasn't going to do her any good; she couldn't hold on any longer

A dark figure hurled down the walkway. It crashed into Leona, knocking her to the watery cement. Then Adam, wide-eyed with terror, was leaning over the side. He grasped her hands just as they began to slip from their hold.

"Hang on, Dana!"

"Adam! Thank God!"

Adam covered her hands with his strong grip, working his fingers down until they clasped her wrists. He pulled and tugged, and finally she fell onto the walkway. She staggered to her feet and into his arms.

"Thank God, you're safe, Dana!" Adam cried.

A noisy group of people poured into the lightroom. Sheriff Dickerson appeared in the doorway. "Who's there? What's going on?"

"Get this woman into custody!" Adam shouted, pointing at the wet heap that was Leona. "And the man inside, too! They tried to kill us!"

Rinaldi and Leaming appeared and dragged Leona's limp body inside the lightroom. Grayson took charge of Burke, who lay on the floor. "Come on, buddy, wake up," the deputy said, slapping Burke's face until his eyelids fluttered.

Then Sheriff Dickerson, in his army commando style, led them all down the winding stairs. Burke and Leona kept their heads bent in sullen silence.

When they reached ground level, the sheriff announced that he wanted to take them all to his office where he would sort everything out. "Do you need a doctor?" he asked Dana. "You must've nearly pulled your arms off, dangling over the side like that."

"I'm okay," Dana said, although she leaned on Adam for support. Her hands were bloody and her legs were badly bruised, but she wanted to get this over with.

"What brought you to the lighthouse?" Dana asked Sheriff Dickerson.

"She called us." Dickerson pointed to a small figure standing behind Deputy Rinaldi.

"She?" Dana echoed.

The hidden figure moved into view.

"Glenda!"

"Yes, good old Glenda," the reporter said with a triumphant smile. Glenda's thin brown hair was plastered to her head. Below her baggy brown slicker, her soaked jeans outlined her thin legs.

Dana said, "You were following me tonight! I thought I saw your car at my condo."

"That was me. I wanted to find out what was going on. Aren't you glad I did?" Glenda lifted her chin defiantly.

"Yes, I am," Dana said, feeling a sudden warmth for the young woman. Where would she and Adam be now if it weren't for Glenda?

Glenda whipped a tape recorder from her jacket pocket. "So, what's this all about? I've got a story to write."

Sheriff Dickerson waved a dismissive hand at Glenda. "No interviews, Glenda, until I finish my investigation. Now, down to the station, everybody."

* * * * *

Half an hour later, Dana and Adam sat wrapped in blankets in one of the sheriff's offices. Dana leaned toward the small electric heater Deputy Rinaldi had set up for them. She was almost dry. On the outside, anyway. Inside, she still felt chilled to the bones.

After a while, Sheriff Dickerson came in. He eased his large body into an old scarred armchair across from Dana and Adam. "Those two are shut up tighter than clams," he told them. "They're not sayin' a word till their lawyers get here. So why don't you two tell me what this is all about?"

Dana saw Adam open his mouth to speak, but she jumped in first. "There was a conspiracy to assassinate murderers whose court cases were dismissed on technicalities."

Sheriff Dickerson's mouth gaped. "What's that you say?"

Dana shot Adam a warning glance that said, "Let me do the talking," then continued, "Leona and Burke thought we found evidence of it . . . among Judge Costain's things . . . and they tricked us into coming to the lighthouse, so they could kill us before we told anybody."

"What evidence?" Sheriff Dickerson still looked disbelieving. "Do you have it?"

"I'm not sure." Dana shot Adam another warning look.

"Not sure?" Dickerson spouted, waving his arms. "Either you do or you don't."

"I have to check at my condo first. They, uh, may have found it there. Look, Sheriff, I am really beat. Could we finish this discussion tomorrow?"

"Dana needs to rest," Adam seconded.

Sheriff Dickerson looked hesitant, then said, "Sure, go on. But tomorrow I want to know if you've got that evidence or not."

As they were leaving, the sheriff said, "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Ramon Lopez came out of his coma. Doc says he should be able to answer questions in a couple days. And the van that ran you down on the beach has been sighted in Montana. We've got the cops there on a stakeout waiting for the guy to come back to his motel."

Dana smiled to herself. So her attempts to bluff Burke and Leona hadn't been lies, after all.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Deputy Rinaldi drove Adam and Dana back to the judge's house. The storm had settled down to a dull roar, Dana noticed, like a tired lion who's ready to give up the battle and slink off to his den.

"Do you feel up to coming in for a while?" Adam asked her as Rinaldi's tail lights disappeared into the darkness. "I'm really puzzled about the way you answered Dickerson's questions just now."

Dana wished he would take her in his arms. She wanted to see again the look of joy and relief that had been on his face when he'd pulled her to the safety of the lighthouse gallery. But he seemed distant. She didn't blame him. She now had the power to ruin his father's reputation. He must be worried about whether or not she was going to use it.

"Yes, let's go in. We need to talk."

Inside, Adam made coffee and built a fire in the living room's stone fireplace. As they settled in front of the dancing flames, Dana was reminded of the night they had made love here. She pushed the bittersweet image from her mind. That seemed a lifetime ago.

Adam sipped his coffee, then turned to her with questioning eyes. "Why didn't you tell Sheriff Dickerson that Burke destroyed the evidence?"

"Because I'm not sure he did."

Adam's mouth gaped. "What do you mean?" he asked when he had recovered his power of speech.

"Before I left my condo to meet you at the lighthouse, I put two cassette tapes in my pocket. The one the judge recorded and a blank one. I remembered he had a cassette duplicating machine, and I thought we ought to make a copy of the one I found."

"When Burke and Leona demanded the tape, I had to give them one, but I didn't know which I was grabbing. Even if I could have looked at it then, it wouldn't have done any good. Neither had anything written on the contents label."

Dana reached into her jacket pocket and drew out the remaining tape. "If you'll bring a player, we'll see if I was lucky or not."

Adam left the room, returning a few minutes later with a small cassette tape machine. Dana held her breath as she inserted the tape and pressed the On button. A couple of seconds of silence elapsed as the tape's lead rolled. Then they heard the judge's voice, then Leona's and Burke's.

Dana sank back against the couch and exhaled in relief. "Boy, did we get lucky."

They listened to the tape, a conversation in which Robert Costain told his cohorts that he no longer wanted to participate in their brand of vigilante justice.

"It's too late to back out now," Adam and Dana heard Burke say.

"You're crazy if you think we're going to let you out of this," Leona echoed.

"It's wrong," came Judge Costain's deep voice. "Sure, the justice system's screwed up, but this isn't the way to fix it."

Leona challenged, "You know what would have happened if we'd have let Manett live. He would have killed his wife next. He threatened her often enough."

"We're saving lives, Bob," Burke said, "by getting rid of scum. What we're doing is right."

Judge Costain said, "No, I can't go on. I'm going to contact my son, Adam. I want to see him again, try

to make up for all the lost years. I can't look him in the eye if I'm involved in something like this."

"You can't look him in the eye, anyway, Bob," Burke said. "You're already a murderer."

"Let your son alone," Leona advised, "and we'll go on with our work."

"No," Judge Costain insisted. "I want out! And if you don't let me out, I'll go to the police with all of this. I have evidence"

"What kind of evidence?" Burke asked, sounding alarmed.

"Never mind, just evidence."

"That would be stupid," Leona said. "I hope you come to your senses about this. . . ."

The voices faded as though the speakers had moved away from the microphone. Adam leaned forward, put his head in his hands as the silent tape continued to roll. At last, the machine clicked off.

Dana's heart ached for Adam. She wanted to put her arms around him, but feared he wouldn't want her to. Offering verbal comfort seemed the safest thing to do. "I'm sorry, Adam," she said. "I know how awful it must be for you to hear these things about your father."

"Yeah, it is. I never dreamed he was involved in something like this. This is terrible. How could they have thought what they were doing was right?"

"Like Leona said at the lighthouse, it made them sick to let criminals go and re-offend. But your father wanted to make amends to you, Adam. Don't forget that."

He raised his head and blew out a breath. "I suppose that should be of some consolation. But I've come to terms with what happened between him and me, anyway."

"You have?"

"Yeah, I found some letters he'd written to me, that I never received. My mother never gave them to me. I read them. It was true, he didn't try to make contact with me for many years, but that was only because when he had tried to see me, not too long after the divorce, my mother told him I didn't want to see him."

"Was that true?"

"Unfortunately, it was. I did tell my mother I didn't want to see him. She'd told me so many bad things about him that I was frightened of him. She told him of my refusal. Each time he tried after that, she told him again that I didn't want anything to do with him, until he finally gave up trying. Since I never got any of his letters, I never knew he was trying to contact me."

"So, it was both your mother's and your father's fault," Dana said.

"Yeah, and mine, too, for saying no that first time. I'm guessing that he compensated for not having a relationship with me by mentoring others, like Len Chavinski, and by helping kids in trouble, like Ramon."

"And by contributing to so many charities that involved kids," Dana added.

Adam nodded. "As you helped me to realize, I didn't make out too badly; I had uncles and a grandfather who were fine role models. So, it's time to let go of my anger at the judge."

"I'm glad you've been able to work through it," Dana said.

"I couldn't have done it without you. You listened, and you were there for me during the bad times."

Dana's insides twisted into a painful knot. Had she only been someone for him to lean on? Someone he

didn't need anymore?

Adam said, without looking at her, "I guess you'll be giving the tape to Sheriff Dickerson."

Dana tensed. So, it had finally arrived, the decision she had hoped she would not have to make. To whom did she owe the most loyalty, herself, or Adam and his father?

She swallowed hard, then said, "I don't have to give it to the sheriff, Adam."

She was surprised at how quickly the answer had come. But perhaps she had known all along what she would do at this moment.

He looked at her in surprise. "Why not? It's the only way Leona and Burke will be charged for their part in all this. You heard Burke say that the hit man was hired anonymously. The tape is the only real evidence about what they were up to."

"But look at all the good the judge did. Why spoil everyone's memory of him?"

"Keep his good reputation intact and let Leona and Burke go on with their killing? Oh, she'd still be charged with her assault on you, but she'd probably get out of that."

"I could say that we did find the evidence, but that it was burned in the lighthouse stove, so now there's no proof."

"That would be a lie."

"I know," she said dejectedly. "But maybe Burke and Leona would stop what they're doing, now that they've come this close to being discovered."

"Maybe." He thought for a long moment, then said, "But what about your story? Don't you want to write the truth about what they were up to? I couldn't stop you from doing that, even if I wanted to. What you found out on the tape is not something I told you off the record. Besides, if you turn over the tape, there will be a trial, and then it'll all be a matter of public record anyway."

No, she wanted to say, her story was not the most important thing in her life. Not anymore. The words clogged in her throat.

"Dana?" He peered at her. "Are you telling me you'd sacrifice your story to protect the judge and me?"

Dana nodded. "You probably think I'm nuts, huh?" Her attempt at a joke didn't work with either of them. She was quivering inside, while he was looking at her as if she were indeed crazy.

He said, softly, "Maybe it's because you're in love with me?"

"That, too," she said in a small voice.

"Ah, Dana." He reached out and gathered her into his arms. Dana nestled against his chest, felt his heart beating under his shirt.

After a few moments, he said, "It's not that I don't appreciate your sacrifice. In fact, I'm awed by it. But we can't let Leona and Burke get away. I want you to turn over the tape to the sheriff and write the truth about the judge and the conspiracy."

He didn't want her sacrifice, after all? Dana felt like laughing and crying, both at the same time.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life. The judge--my father--would have wanted the truth to be known. He said so on the tape. And if what he did affects my reputation, well, I'll survive. You're the best one to tell the story, Dana. I want you to do it."

"I appreciate your faith in me, Adam."

"You're not like the other reporters I've dealt with; you have integrity. I know you'll be fair and truthful."

"I'll do the best I can."

He laughed. "Don't worry; I'll be looking over your shoulder every minute."

"What?" She pulled away from him to look into his eyes. They glinted with teasing. "Would you like to explain that, please?"

He ran a knuckle down her cheek. "Remember awhile back when I said I didn't think I could say good-bye to you?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, now I know I can't. I'm in love with you, too, even though I fought the idea as best I could. I told myself all the reasons why a relationship between us wouldn't work. But they don't hold any weight compared to the power of love."

Although Adam's words thrilled her, Dana still had doubts. "But, Adam, how can we be together? Hundreds of miles separate us. We both have our careers"

"We'll have challenges," he admitted soberly. "We'll have to carry on a long distance relationship for a while, until one of us can relocate. We'll have a nasty trial to go through, and who knows what else. But I want to give our relationship a try. What do you say?"

Dana knew there was nothing she wanted more than to work things out with Adam. "Yes, it's too good to just let go," she agreed.

"I was hoping you'd say that." Adam gazed deeply into her eyes. "Right now, I have the strongest urge to kiss you."

Dana tipped up her chin. "Well, then, why don't you?"

And he did.

The end