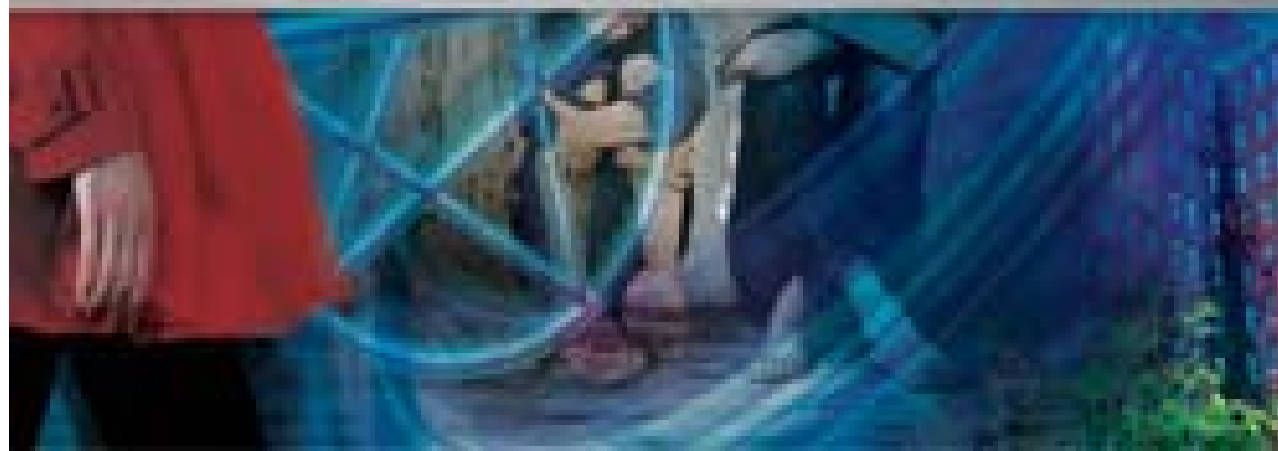


**\* Brilliance**

**#1 NEW YORK TIMES-BESTSELLING AUTHOR**

# J. D. ROBB

## TAKEN IN DEATH



**TAKEN IN DEATH**

**J. D. ROBB**

*In memory of Tom Langan,  
a one-in-a-million hero*

When a child fell into her power,  
she killed it, cooked and ate it,  
and that was a feast day with her.

THE BROTHERS GRIMM

Good and evil we know in the field  
of this world grow up  
together almost inseparably.

JOHN MILTON

# PROLOGUE



The evil witch killed Darcia. Henry knew it because he'd seen Darcia on the floor, and all the blood. He'd wanted to shout and cry and run. He'd wanted to fight, a brave warrior, a knight in battle, like the hero in his favorite stories. But he couldn't. Everything felt funny and sleepy and wrong. He knew he was under a spell. The evil witch's magic spell.

And when he looked at Gala, his twin sister, her eyes were like the blue glass in the vase with white flowers on the table.

The evil witch had cast a spell on them so they were like the zombies in his vid game, so he and Gala just shuffled along and the words he wanted to say came out like low, creepy moans.

The spell made his head feel thick and too big. And under the spell he was really scared.

She made them wait, the evil witch, while she packed stuff in their special going-on-a-trip bags. Waiting, he thought the spell started to lift. Though his head still felt big and thick, he remembered the secret in his pocket.

The witch took them out of the house, and told them to get in the back of the car, to lie down, to sleep.

He wanted to run away, to grab Gala's hand and run, but the spell made him get in the car. They lay down together, Henry and Gala, and shivering, held each other close.

Maybe the witch would take them to a dungeon or a tower and lock them up. But he didn't sleep because he had the secret, and something he could do. If he could just say the words.

When the witch said, "We're going to have such fun! We're going to live in a special place made of sugar plums and chocolate icing," he didn't believe her.

He saw a tear slide down Gala's cheek, and he tried to comfort her inside their minds.

*I'll protect you, Gala. I won't let anything bad happen to you.*

*We'll protect each other,* her mind said to his.

He wanted to cry, too, but he had to be brave. He had to take care of his sister, and find the way home again.

Because evil witches lied. Even when they looked like Mommy.

# CHAPTER ONE

In her long leather coat, her choppy brown hair wind-blown, Lieutenant Eve Dallas stood in the sprawling living space of a three-story town house on the upper-crust of the East Side. The dead woman wore blood-soaked pajamas covered with dancing puppy dogs. She lay on her back, one arm flung overhead. The blood trail and spatter told the tale, clearly.

But for now Dallas gave the uniform standing by the go-ahead.

“The nine-one-one caller states she’s a friend of the victim. She identifies same as Darcia Jordan. The wit—Elena Cortez—and the vic are nannies. The vic’s employers—”

“If she’s a nanny, where are the kids? Is this her residence or place of employment?”

“Ah, both, sir. She works for Ross and Tosha MacDermitt, who own the place. We did a search through, didn’t find any kids. No sign of struggle or disturbance anywhere but here. But there is indication some clothes and toys were packed up, taken out. Two kids, one male, one female. Twins, age seven.”

“Peabody.” Dallas turned to her partner. “Get their names, descriptions, photos out now. Get the Amber Alert out, now.”

“Lieutenant, the parents are, according to the wit, on vacation. We haven’t been able to contact them, so it’s possible the kids are with them. It didn’t seem like—”

“I don’t care what it seems like or doesn’t to you, Officer. The nanny’s dead and the kids are unaccounted for.”

“But protocol—” The cold fire on her face had him dropping that ball.

“They’ve got a security cam on the door. I want the disc. Keep the witness close. I’ll speak to her shortly.” Turning her back, Eve stepped to the body. Opening her field kit, she verified identification first.

“Victim is identified as Jordan, Darcia, age twenty-nine. Single, no offspring. Employed by Ross and Tosha MacDermit, as Parental Assistant. Is that the new term for nanny? The victim has multiple stab wounds. Throat, right shoulder, chest. Defensive wounds on the palm of the right hand, on the right forearm.”

Frowning, she eased the neck of the ruined pajama top down slightly. “Hell. There’s a small pentagram carved just above her heart. Shallow cuts, but a clear pattern. Possible ritual slaying.”

She used her gauge to determine time of death. “TOD, straight-up midnight.”

“Alert’s out.”

Eve nodded at Peabody. “Take a look.”

Bending down, Peabody studied the occult symbol. “Crap. You think ritual?”

“I think the killer took the time to cut this into the vic.”

Peabody, her square face full of worry, glanced toward the stairs. “I’m going to do another search. Kids hide.”

“Go ahead. Closets, cabinets, under beds.” And remembering another young survivor, added, “Bathtubs, showers.” Standing again, she scanned the area.

“A lot of valuables, electronics, easily portable. Check for jewelry, cash,” she called out to Peabody, then took the disc the uniform brought her.

She popped it into the living area’s wall screen. “Run disc,” she ordered, “begin twenty-three thirty. Scanning speed.”

All quiet, she thought, studying the camera view of the entrance, the sidewalk and street beyond. Just an ordinary fall evening heading to the end of 2060 in an upper-class East Side neighborhood.

At time stamp twenty-three fifty-four, she saw the late-model, black, four-door sedan slide to the curb.

“Freeze image, enhance. Run that plate,” she snapped to the uniform. “Continue, standard speed.”

She watched the woman—tall, curvy, blonde, late thirties, long black coat, high boots—get out of the car, cross the sidewalk to the entrance door.



She flicked a glance up, toward the camera, smiled—slyly. And rang the bell.

“Lieutenant—”

Eve held up a finger to silence the uniform, watched the woman speak. A lip reader might get the words, even though the woman turned her face. Then she smiled again, stepped forward out of range.

“Scanning speed.”

In her mind, Eve saw what happened inside, away from the camera. A strike out with the knife, catching the throat. A step or stumble back, a hand thrown up. Another strike with the knife, cutting the hand, the arm, the shoulder, driving the victim back. Two hacks into the chest, and the coup de grace, the second, killing slice of the throat.

And using the tip of the knife, after death, to mark the dead.

She slowed the run again when the woman—red coat now, a large travel tote over each arm—led two absurdly pretty redheaded kids with glazed eyes out of the house.

They went without protest, swaying toward each other like miniature drunks, and climbed in the backseat. After stowing the totes in the trunk, the woman slid behind the wheel.

Eve clearly saw the woman throw back her head and laugh before she pulled away.

“Vehicle data, Officer.”

“Yes, sir, that’s the thing. The car is registered to Ross and Tosha MacDermid. And that woman, sir? That’s Tosha MacDermid.” She held out his PPC, showing Eve the woman’s photo and ID data.

“I recognized her from when we accessed the data to try to contact. That’s the vic’s employer, Lieutenant. That’s the mother.”

“Why didn’t she let herself in? Why kill the nanny instead of telling her to get out? Does the wit know where she and the husband are?”

“Not exactly. A second honeymoon deal. An island, maybe South Seas. She wasn’t sure. She was pretty hysterical.”

Employers, Eve thought, and brought up the data on her own PPC, began to scan.

The wife was employed by the UN as an interpreter, held dual citizenship, and that would require some untangling of red tape.

Husband, a self-employed artist.

“Start a canvass, Officer. Knock on doors. Find out where the MacDermits are supposed to be, when they left, when they’re due back. Find out if anyone saw her come home last night. If they keep their car on the street or in a garage. Get some answers.”

“No sign of the kids,” Peabody said as she started downstairs. “No sign of burglary—a lot of visible valuables up there. I found this.” She held up a long black coat. “In the master closet. It looks like bloodstains. Smells like blood.”

“It would. The killer wore it while stabbing the nanny. Left that behind, traded coats. Bag and tag. The security disc shows the mother arriving about six minutes before TOD, ringing the bell.”

Peabody, bending over to pull an evidence bag from her kit, jerked back up. “The mother, but—”

Eve gestured to the screen, backtracked, zoomed in on Tosha MacDermitt’s face.

“That’s the mother. And here . . .” Zipping forward, she ran the section showing her leading the two children out.

“Why kill the nanny?” Peabody wondered. “An affair with the husband?”

“An always popular theme.” Thumbs tucked in her belt loops, Eve took another hard scan of the room, the blood patterns, the body. “She may have done him, too, elsewhere. Kill the cheaters, take the kids, and leave. But she doesn’t take any valuables?”

“Done with them,” Peabody suggested, “done with the cheaters? She could hit, or have already hit their financials. At least it’s really unlikely the kids are in any danger. She’s their mother.”

“Look at them.” Eve zoomed in again on each pretty face. “That’s not just getting-woken-up-in-the-middle-of-the-night groggy. Look at the pupils, at the way they walk.”

“Drugged?”

“They had to walk out the front door, which means walking right by the nanny’s dead and bloody body. I’d think that might cause a little bit of upset. Instead, they look . . . slack, empty.”

“Maybe she gave them something so they wouldn’t get upset, give her any trouble—maybe not even really understand the body and blood.”

“Maybe. She’s an interpreter for the UN. We need to start pushing there. He’s a freelance artist.”

“Sculptor primarily, if the third-floor studio’s any indication. A good one, too. Fairy-tale stuff with an edge.”

“We need to find out where they went, where they are, and if the husband’s still alive. Let’s take the wit outside. Grab the disc, log and seal.”

She stepped outside into the stiff breeze that tugged at her coat. It skimmed back through her hair and chilled her hands. She never remembered gloves until it was too late.

Bystanders gathered just outside the sidewalk barricades. She scanned them with eyes the color of good Irish whiskey, and cop flat. And spotted the witness in the back of a black-and-white.

“If she’s hysterical,” she told her partner, “you take the lead.”

But Elena Cortez’s hysteria had shifted to watery shock and grief. She stepped out of the car, wringing a damp cloth hankie in her hands.

“I’m Lieutenant Dallas, Ms. Cortez, and this is Detective Peabody. Tell us what happened.”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. I came with the children—”

“The children.”

“Sasha and Mica. I’m their nanny. They’re friends with Henry and Gala, and Darcia . . . Darcia and I . . . we’re friends.” She sucked her breath in three times as she pressed the hankie to her mouth. “Good friends.”

Fat tears spilled out, down her thin face. “We walk them to school together, and I waited on the corner, down there”—she pointed south—“but she didn’t come. And it was cold, so I took the children to school, and I came back to see what happened. She didn’t answer when I texted her, so I came to see. Maybe she’s sick, I thought, or one of the children. She wouldn’t forget. We walk them every day to school, and the MacDermits are away.”

“Where away?”

“I— Somewhere warm and important and romantic. They come back tomorrow. They have their tenth anniversary. It’s a special trip.”

“Okay, what happened when you came back here, to see?”

“She didn’t answer. I worried a little. I don’t know why I did it.”

“Did what?”

“I tried the door. I don’t know why, it’s always locked, but it was . . . impulse? I don’t know, but it wasn’t locked. I just pushed it open, and I called out. I stepped in, just a little. I saw blood, then I saw Darcia. I saw her on the floor, with the blood.”

She pressed both hands to her face. “I should have gone in, looked for the children, but I shut the door, very fast, and I called nine-one-one. I started to run first, but I called nine-one-one, and they said to stay. So I stayed.”

“You did exactly right,” Peabody told her gently, as the tears fell faster, faster.

“The children? Did he hurt the children?”

“The children aren’t hurt, as far as we know. Elena,” Peabody continued, “do you know anyone who’d want to hurt Darcia?”

“No. No. No one.”

“How did she get along with her employers?” Eve asked.

“They’re family. She’s been with them since the twins were babies.”

“Did she have . . . a special relationship with Mr. MacDermitt?”

The insinuation went over Elena’s head as she smiled a little. “She loved him. He’s such a nice man. A big kid, she said sometimes. When I bring the children over, he always makes us laugh. He’s a very important artist, but he’s very nice. And a very good father. Not all men are such good fathers.”

Eve had reason to know the truth of that.

“And his relationship with his wife?” Eve asked.

“Oh, they . . .” She stopped, eyes widening.

A cab pulled up, and its rear doors flew open.

“They’re home! Oh God, they’re home.”

So they were, Eve thought. She stepped forward to intercept them—the big, broad-shouldered man with a mane of wild red hair and fierce green eyes, and the tall curvy blonde.

“What’s going on?” The blonde tried to push by Eve toward the house. “What’s happening? Where are my babies?”

“That’s exactly what I want to ask you.”

## CHAPTER TWO

As his gaze tracked—police vehicles, barricades, then fixed on Eve’s face—Ross MacDermid wrapped a beefy arm around his wife’s shoulders. “They’re in school, Tosh—relax. What’s going on?” he demanded of Eve. “Did something happen to Darcia? Our nanny?”

“Again, your wife has that answer.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. What’s happening here? Where’s Darcia? Ross, contact the school, make sure Henry and Gala are okay.”

“I’m talking about you coming home a few minutes before midnight last night, Ms. MacDermid. And when Darcia Jordan let you in, you stabbed her to death.”

The woman’s ice-queen pale face went sickly gray. “What? What? Darcia—”

Once again, Eve blocked the woman’s push toward the house. “Then you drugged your children and brought them out to your car, put them inside, and took them to another location. Where are the children?”

“Our children?” Her eyes, wild with fear, wheeled toward the house. “Henry. Gala. Somebody took our babies?”

This time it took Eve and Peabody to hold her back, and several uniforms to restrain Ross.

“Your home security clearly shows you arriving at eleven fifty-four last night, six minutes before Darcia Jordan’s death.”

At Eve’s words, Tosha let out a wailing sob. “No.”

“And the vehicle you drove is registered to you. It clearly shows you departing, at twelve twenty-three, with the children.”

“That’s impossible.” Ross bellowed it as he fought to jerk free of the uniforms restraining him. “We were in New Zealand, for God’s sake. What’s the time difference? God!” He squeezed his eyes shut. “Seventeen hours ahead, seventeen ahead,” he murmured, the words shivering out like a prayer. “At midnight in New York we were

in New Zealand having drinks by the pool with a couple we met at the resort. Dom and Madeline Porter, from Oxford, England. I have their contact information. I have the contact information for the resort. The cocktail waitress can confirm, the towel boy can confirm. We were in New Zealand. We were halfway around the damn world.”

“We’ll check on that, and we’ll have your security disc analyzed. Until that time . . .”

Eve trailed off as Tosha had gone very still, and the tears glazing her eyes seemed to freeze. “Ross.” She groped out for his hand. “Maj.”

“No. No, it can’t be. It’s all just some horrible mistake.”

“Who is Maj?” Eve demanded.

“My sister.” Tosha shuddered when she said it. “My twin.”

BECAUSE SHE WANTED THEM BOTH CONTAINED, AND wanted to move quickly, Eve took them through the small gate, across their own rear courtyard, and in through the kitchen.

“Check the alibi,” she told Peabody.

“I think, damn math, I think it’s maybe the middle of the night there. Or tomorrow. Either way, I’ll wake somebody up, get it started.”

The MacDermits huddled together, hands locked, in a sunny nook where Eve imagined the family typically had breakfast.

She slid in across from them.

“There’s no data on a sibling, Ms. MacDermid, much less a twin on your official information.”

“No, there wouldn’t be. I . . . You can contact Wanda Sykes. She was my legal representative when I came here, here to New York. And, and Markus Norby. He’s police in Sweden. Paul Stouffer, who was with Child Protective Services there. And, ah, Dr. Otto Ryden, he was the psychologist assigned.”

“Assigned to what?”

“The case. I was legally permitted to omit Maj from my data, to legally change my maiden name—Borgstrom—after . . . after Maj killed our father. She killed Papa like she killed Darcia. She tried to

kill me. We were twelve. I haven't seen or spoken to Maj in over twenty years."

"You're identical twins."

"Nearly. She has a birthmark. Here." Tosha touched her fingers between her left breast and shoulder. It trembled there. "It looks like a pentagram. A sign of witchcraft. I know how that sounds," she went on when Eve said nothing. "I can only tell you she's evil. She has a darkness in her, more than a sickness. They said she was sick, but . . ."

She lowered her hand, once again gripped her husband's like a lifeline. "I think she hated me even when we were in the womb, for being part of her, for preventing her from being the only. The One, she would say. There can only be one. Now she has my children. You have to find our children."

"We already have the alert out. Where do you keep your car, your four-door black sedan?"

"In a private garage on Fifty-seventh," Ross told her. "What difference does it make? What difference? We have to find Henry and Gala."

"We're looking. The alerts are out, and we're already looking. Everything you tell me, everything we learn, is going to help. You say you haven't seen or spoken to your sister in more than twenty years, yet she arrived here, in your vehicle."

"I can only tell you she's very smart and full of hate. Still, we shared a bond, as twins can. We would know what the other was thinking or feeling. She would hurt me whenever she could, so I learned to *know* when she meant to, and hide from her. And to keep my mind very, very still so she couldn't find me. She'll hurt our babies. She'll hurt what's mine. Please."

Tosha reached across the table to grab Eve's hands. "Please, find her before she hurts them. They're only seven years old."

"We're going to set up a tap. She may contact you, may demand a ransom."

"It's not money she wants. She wants to bring me pain."

"If she hurts Henry and Gala, I'll kill her."

Tosha turned her face into her husband's shoulder at his fierce and quiet words. "I never thought she'd find me, us. I should never

have left the children. I should never have left them.”

Peabody came back in, gave Eve a nod to indicate the alibi checked. “Is it all right if I make coffee?”

She spoke directly to Ross, got a momentary blank stare. “Yeah, sure. Ah.”

“I’ll take care of it.”

“One minute,” Eve said, and rose to have a quick word with Peabody.

“You said she killed your father,” Eve began when she sat again. “Where’s your mother?”

“She died giving birth to us. It was a very difficult birthing, complications, unexpected complications. Maj blamed me. If we had been one instead of two, our mother would have lived, she would say to me. I came second, and so I killed our mother. I should never have been born.”

“What happened to Maj after your father’s death?”

“What does it matter?” Ross exploded. “Sitting here isn’t finding Henry and Gala.”

“Right now, there’s a full, global alert out on both children, and another on Maj. We have the vehicle she was driving, and every cop in the city will be looking for it. We’ll arrange the wire so that if she tries to contact either of you, we’ll know. But the more I know about the person who took your kids, the more ammunition I have to find her. What happened to her?”

“She was committed to the Borj Institute for the Criminally Insane in Stockholm,” Tasha told Eve. “I testified against her, and I told what happened to the police, to the psychiatrists, to everyone.”

“What did happen?”

“She came to kill me. To end me once and for all. Papa had punished her that day because she took my new doll to the garden and burned it. She marked it with my name, and burned it, and he took her new doll away, and she was confined to her room. She couldn’t go outside to play or talk to friends. For a week, he said. She was so angry, and she came to kill me.”

Tasha pressed her lips into a thin, trembling line. Her eyes, an arctic blue, pleaded into Eve’s. “I . . . saw inside her mind, and I knew. I ran outside and I hid, and I made my mind still. But hers



wasn't still. She couldn't find me, and instead she went to Papa's room, and while he slept, she stabbed him with the knife from the kitchen. She stabbed his heart, and she cut his throat. She stabbed, and stabbed, and she made a mark on him, like her birthmark."

"She carved a pentagram on him?"

"Yes. And she . . ." A sob broke through though Tosha muffled it with her hand.

"What?"

"She . . . drank. His blood. She licked and lapped at it. Oh God. God, Ross. I can still see it. I saw it in my head, and I see it now."

"Tosh. Tosha. It's over." He took both her hands, pressed his lips against them. "It's done. I'm right here."

How many times, Eve wondered, had Roarke said those same words to her when she woke from nightmares?

They were never really over.

"What happened then?" Eve asked.

"I ran to the neighbor's house so they could help, but it was too late. They called the police, and the man, the neighbor, he went to our house. He found her on the bed with Papa, with the knife. He said she was laughing.

"They took her away, and I never went home again. I only saw her again when I testified. She said to me one day she would come for me and take all I loved. Now she has. They're only children, and so innocent. She'll hate them for that, for their innocence."

"We're going to do everything we can to get them back safe. You said Stockholm. When did you come to New York?"

"When I was eighteen. I lived in the countryside, with a family in Sweden. They were good to me. But I wanted to be away, far away. There had been nightmares until I was almost sixteen. She'd come into my sleep. I can't explain."

"You don't have to." Eve knew exactly.

"Dr. Ryden helped me. He helped me learn to keep her away, and to keep my own mind from reaching into hers. But when I was old enough, I wanted to be away. I came to New York to live, to study, to work."

"Are you a sensitive, Tosha?"

“No, no, it’s not the same. Only with her. And now, not even that. I don’t feel her, I don’t see her. If I did, I would have known she was close, that she wanted the children.”

“You came home a day early?”

“Yes, we wanted to come home, to surprise Darcia . . . Darcia.” She pressed her hand to her mouth. “Darcia and the children. We have gifts for them. Oh God, she killed Darcia. She was my true sister. My little sister, and Maj killed her.”

Peabody set a cup in front of Tosha. “I made some herbal tea. You should drink it. Your kids’ faces are on every screen in the country now. Your sister’s, too.”

“I have another question,” Eve began. “Do Henry and Gala know about Maj?”

“No.” Rocking, Ross pressed Tosha’s hand to his lips again, as much for comfort as to offer it.

“I didn’t want them to know, or to be afraid, or to understand, so young, that there’s real evil in the world. She’s from another life,” Tosha added, then stopped, went white again. “We’re the same. We look the same. They’ll think she’s me, their mother. Oh God, they won’t understand.”

“She’s got no reason to hurt them. Listen, *listen*,” Eve stressed as Tosha began to weep. “If she’d wanted to hurt them, to kill them, she would’ve done it here, right here in your home, where you’d come back and find them. She took them for a reason. She packed clothes and toys for them. Why would she do that if she only meant to kill them?”

Though her breath stayed rapid and ragged, Tosha nodded. “She . . . wants them because they’re mine—and hers—we share blood, we share faces, bodies. We’re almost the same. She wants them.” She turned to her husband, held on, held close. “She wants them, Ross. She won’t hurt them as long as she wants them.”

Only, Eve thought, until she gets tired of them. Or until they fulfilled her purpose for them. But she let the terrified parents hold on to that slim thread of hope.

IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A DUNGEON, OR A TOWER. IT LOOKED like a bedroom—the two beds, the two dressers, the toys on the shelves. There was a bathroom, not like the one at home. It had only a toilet and a sink. And no door to close for privacy.

The rooms had no windows, and the only door was locked.

On a big red table sat a blue and white tea set with bowls of little cupcakes, and gumdrops and frosted cookies.

His stomach hurt, and his head.

"Mine, too," Gala whispered. "And I'm so thirsty."

They'd told each other not to eat or drink, but they were only seven.

"We'll have just a little bit," Henry decided.

But they were so hungry, and the pot held cherry fizzies instead of tea. So they gobbled up the treats.

"Is it a game?" Gala wondered. "Papa likes games."

"I don't think it's a game. Darcia . . ."

"Maybe it was pretend." Gala's eyes filled. "Mommy loves us. She loves Darcia. Mommy wouldn't hurt us or Darcia."

"It's not Mommy." Henry's handsome little face screwed into fierce lines. "She's an evil witch who cast a spell so she looks like Mommy, but she's not."

"Are you sure?"

"She said she'd hurt us if we didn't drink that stuff. When she stopped the car and told us to drink that stuff, she said she'd hurt you if I didn't drink, and hurt me if you didn't. Mommy wouldn't do that."

"No, Mommy wouldn't."

"It made us go to sleep, like a spell, so we woke up in here."

"I don't want to be here. I want Mommy. I want Papa."

"They'll find us." He took a deep breath. "They'll send a good witch to fight the bad witch, and to get us out, to take us home."

"How will the good witch find us here?"

"I don't know, but she will." *I can't say it out loud*, he said into his sister's mind.

The magic talk was a secret, even from their parents.

*You can't say it either, or she might hear.*

*I won't.*

*I took the Jamboree to bed with me.*

*You're not supposed to!*

*I know, but I did. It's in my secret pocket, the one Darcia made for my pajamas. I'm going to send messages to the good witch to help her find us. We can't let the bad witch know, or she'll take it away.*

*But we don't know where we are.*

*She'll know!* He heard the door creak. *Don't tell her!*

Maj opened the door, smiled broadly. "It's quiet in here. Just what are you two talking about?"

Gala curled her fingers into Henry's, and promised not to tell. "We want to go home now," she said to the witch who looked like Mommy.

"You are home. This is your home now. And look at this! You ate and ate and ate. Cookies and candies and cake. You'll get fat, fat as little pigs. Fat enough to eat." She laughed, and Gala no longer thought she looked like her mother.

"Fat enough to eat," Maj said again. "Yum. Yum. Yum."

## CHAPTER THREE

With Peabody, Eve stepped back into the living area. The business of murder played out around them with the MacDermits safely tucked away in the kitchen with two uniforms. The morgue team had already taken the body, and the sweepers swarmed through the rest of the area.

“Get everything there is to get on Maj Borgstrom,” Eve ordered. “Everything. Add in EDD if you need assistance there.” She pulled out her own ’link as she spoke. “And arrange for the MacDermits to move into a safe house.”

“On that.”

Thinking fast, Eve contacted Dr. Charlotte Mira, the NYPSP’s top profiler and psychologist. “I need Mira,” she snapped to the dragon who guarded Mira’s gates. “Don’t fuck with me.”

Mira’s admin’s face bunched up like a fist. “Lieutenant Dallas—”

“I don’t care if she’s headshrinking God, do it now.”

If the clenched jaw was an indicator, Eve would have hell to pay later, but the ’link screen shifted to waiting blue. Seconds later Mira’s calmer face came on.

“Eve?”

“Maj Borgstrom. She was committed to the Borj Institute for the Criminally Insane in Stockholm as a minor, about twenty-five years ago. Murdered her father. She’s just killed her twin sister’s nanny here in New York, and abducted the sister’s twin kids—boy and girl, age seven. I need whatever you can find out from her doctors. Anything, everything. And I need it now.”

“How long has she had the children?”

“Since just after midnight.”

“Let me see what I can do.”

“Fast,” Eve added, then clicked off. She contacted the other ace up her sleeve—a man who had connections and sway everywhere she could think of in the known universe.

For the second time she drew an admin, but this one smiled at her. “Lieutenant, how can I help you?”

“I need to talk to him, right away.”

Caro’s smile faded, but she nodded briskly. “One moment.”

It took hardly more before Roarke came on. She saw mild annoyance on his truly stupendous face, just a hint of it in those intense blue eyes.

“Sorry,” she said immediately. “It’s urgent. Who do you know in Stockholm? The heavier the weight, the better.”

“Would the Prime Minister be weighty enough?”

“Sounds like it. Here’s the deal.” She ran it through for him quickly, hitting the high points, knowing her husband could and would connect the dots.

“I’ll make some calls.”

“Appreciate it.”

“That’s smart,” Peabody commented. “Pulling in the big guns, medically and politically.”

“We use what weapons we’ve got.”

“I’ve got the safe house set up,” Peabody continued. “The Belmont. It’s close to Central. I didn’t know who you wanted assigned. But with a kidnapping, the feds—”

“They’ll be notified.” She had another weapon there, in the form of her commander. Once again she pulled out her ’link and contacted one of her detectives.

“Jenkinson. I need you and Reineke on protection detail.” She briefed him as succinctly as she had Roarke, gave him the location and the destination. “Bring in EDD to set up the tap, and move it.”

As she ended transmission, she turned back to Peabody. “Check in with the uniforms. See if we’re having any luck with the canvass.” And once again, she used the ’link, went through an admin, and quickly to Commander Whitney.

“Sir—”

“I’ve seen the alert, have the bare bones.”

Saved time, she thought. “I’m having the parents moved to the Belmont with Jenkinson and Reineke on first shift. I’m going to order a tap on their electronics, considering the possibility of contact or ransom demand, though I believe both are low. BOLOs have been

issued for the suspect and the vehicle she was driving—which belonged to the parents, the MacDermits, and was kept in a private garage. I've asked Dr. Mira to contact the suspect's medicals in Sweden, and I enlisted the aid of a civilian consultant. Roarke knows the Prime Minister over there, and may help cut through some of the international red tape to information."

"I'll arrange for the tap," he told her. "I expect to be contacted by the feds at any moment."

"Yes, sir. I fully intended to contact the FBI. However, as the suspect may have entered the country illegally, or, in fact, may be wanted in Sweden, I considered this may be an international incident, with international repercussions. With that consideration I'm unsure whether to have a conversation with the FBI or the HSO or Global."

Whitney's broad, dark face remained impassive, but she saw the acknowledgment in his eyes. "That is a consideration. The politics are complicated at this point. It may be best for me to contact the HSO, let the federal agencies hash out their food chain. I will, at this point, request Agent Teasdale out of HSO assist, if such assistance is warranted."

"Thank you, sir. I have the name of a police contact involved in the investigation, in Sweden, of the suspect's father's murder. A CPS contact, and a shrink as well."

"Give me what you have, and we'll deal with the international red tape."

"Thank you, sir." She listed the names. "I'll continue the investigation as primary until further orders."

She caught Peabody's smirk as she pocketed her 'link. "What?"

"You're riding the smart bus today. Angling for Teasdale on the federal side because we've worked with her before. We know she's solid, doesn't hot dog."

"And isn't an asshole," Eve finished. "Right now, it's still all NYPSPD."

"Nothing on the canvass yet," Peabody reported.

"Nothing more to do here now, and no time to waste. We'll go check out the garage, see how she got in."

“Those kids have to be scared,” Peabody began as they walked out to Eve’s vehicle. “I know you said ransom’s unlikely, but what else does she want them for? Because you’re right. If she wanted to kill them or mess them up, she’d have done it in the house, left them like the nanny for her sister to find.”

“Then the torture’s over. Dead’s dead, and ends it. Not knowing’s worse than knowing. But that doesn’t mean she won’t hurt them.”

“Kill them, dispose of the bodies.”

Eve shook her head as she drove. “I don’t know, but I can’t see why she’d have packed stuff for them if she wanted to end them right away. How did she find the sister? How long has she known where Tosha lives, about the kids? When did she get out of the institution and how? Once we get those answers we might have a better idea what she’s planning.”

She pulled up at the garage, a three-level building. Two for vehicles, from the looks of it, she thought, and top-level apartments, maybe offices.

“You’ve got the name Tosha gave us for the owner?”

“Bing Francis.”

“Contact him.” Eve studied the setup. Upscale security cams, swipe bar, scanner.

She held her badge to the scanner, watched the red beam play over it.

*Dallas, Lieutenant Eve. Identification verified. Please place warrant for entry on scanner.*

“I don’t have one. This is a police investigation. I need to know how an individual posing as Tosha MacDermid, registered owner of the 2059 Class-A Orbit Sedan, New York license number Tango, Echo, Victor, zero, six, one, gained entry to these premises and accessed said vehicle.”

*I am unable to process this information.*

“I bet. Listen—”

Even as she geared up for a pissing match with the computer, Peabody signaled. “The owner’s coming down. He lives upstairs.”

“Good enough. Disappointing,” she admitted, sneering at the scanner. “But good enough.”



He came around the corner of the building, a big man, heavy in the belly and with a wide, Irish face, keen hazel eyes.

“Bing Francis,” he said. “You just caught me. I was about to head out. What can I do you for?”

“I need access to the garage.”

“Well now, I sure want to cooperate with the police.” Still smiling broadly, he spread his big hands. “But I gotta ask why.”

“You haven’t had the screen on this morning, Mr. Francis?”

“Can’t say I have. Had my music going. Why?”

Eve drew out Tosha’s ID photo. “You know this woman?”

“Sure I do. Ms. MacDermid. Come on now.” He added a quick laugh. “She can’t be in trouble.”

“She’s in serious trouble, and the person causing it got into this garage last night and took her car.”

“Now, that can’t be. Ms. MacDermid took the car her own self.”

“How do you know that?”

“Well, she forgot her swipe, and couldn’t remember her code. Just flustered, she was. So she asked me to let her in. People forget sometimes, it’s not a crime.”

“No, it’s not. But it wasn’t Ms. MacDermid.”

“I was looking right at her.” He tapped under his eyes with split index and middle fingers. “Close as I am to you.”

“Did you ask her for ID?”

“I *know* her.” Irritation pinked up in his face. “She and Mr. MacDermid have kept their car here for more than five years now.”

“Did she ever forget her swipe and code before?”

“No, but—”

“It wasn’t Ms. MacDermid. It looked like her, but Ms. MacDermid was in New Zealand. That’s verified. And the person you let in killed Darcia Jordan and abducted Henry and Gala MacDermid.”

“What are you talking about?” The pink faded to dead white. “Darcia? She’s dead? Somebody took those kids? I’m telling you it was Ms. . . . Oh sweet Jesus, sweet Jesus, was it a clone—that llove thing? I saw the vid, and . . . you’re that cop! You’re those cops. The llove cops.”

“We’re New York City cops,” Eve corrected. “And no, she isn’t a clone. She’s Tosha MacDermid’s twin sister, and she’s dangerous.”

What time did she take the car?”

“God almighty. I didn’t know she had a sister, much less a twin. If I had, I . . . I don’t know. This is awful. Those are the damnedest cutest kids. And polite, too. And Darcia . . .”

“I know it’s a shock, Mr. Francis, but we need to know what time the woman posing as Tosha MacDermid got the car.”

“I guess, yeah, yeah, it was just before seven last night. And now that I know, I see she was off.” Francis pulled a bandanna out of his back pocket, swiped it over his face. “Didn’t sound like Ms. MacDermid so much.”

“What do you mean?”

“The accent. The real one hardly has one, you don’t much notice. But the one yesterday, it was a little heavier. And she laughed different.” He rubbed his face again. “I gave her the start code for the car. She said how she just couldn’t remember a thing—long day at work. I didn’t think twice about it. If I had . . .”

“It’s not your fault,” Peabody told him. “You thought you were helping a client.”

“Hand to God, I did, but those kids . . . Anything happens to them, I don’t know how I’ll live with it.”

“I’d still like access.”

With a nod at Eve, he used his own master swipe, coded in. “Anything I can do. Anything. She didn’t get the boosters out of the trunk.”

“The boosters?” Eve asked as the big door slowly grumbled open.

“Kid seats,” Peabody told her. “They’re young enough to need them.”

“I figured maybe her and the mister were headed out for the night. Their slot’s right over . . . The car. She brought it back.”

“I can see that.” Eve moved into the garage, and to the black sedan tidily parked between two others. “Do you have a log-in?”

“Absolutely. Just give me a minute.”

He hustled over to a wall comp.

“Didn’t bother to lock it,” Eve observed as she opened the driver’s door. “Get the code, Peabody, let’s open the trunk.”

She’d have sweepers process the car, but she wanted to take a first pass.

“She brought it back at twelve forty-six this morning,” Bing announced, and shut his eyes as Peabody started to open the trunk. “Please, God, don’t let those babies be in there.”

“Booster seats—one pink, one blue. Maintenance kit, spare, first-aid kit.” Peabody scanned the inside with a wand, then stepped back. “No sign of blood.”

“She put them in the backseat.” Picturing it, Eve moved to search through the back. “She either doesn’t think she’ll need the car or didn’t have a secure place to keep it out of sight. But she’s got them somewhere reasonably close, somewhere she can drive to, secure the kids, and drive back in under a half hour. That’s good to know. Got a mini-disc here, sticking out of the backseat.”

She drew it out carefully, frowned at it. “What the hell kind of disc is this? It’s got a monkey on it. A monkey in a bathing suit.”

“For a kid’s toy. Like a kid’s PPC, sort of. Plays games, does some limited communication, like an old-style walkie-talkie sort of. Also limited Internet access, depending on parental guidelines.” Peabody shrugged. “Lots of kids have them. He probably lost the disc back there when he was playing with it.”

“The car’s so clean you could eat off the floor.” Eve shook her head. “And it was stuck in the seat with just the edge sticking out. I think the kid planted it. How do we play this thing?”

“We’d need the toy—another of the same kind. I think there are a lot of them on the market.”

“A Jamboree!” Francis shouted it, and this time his face flushed red with excitement. “I’ve seen Henry with that a dozen times the last couple months. He got it for his birthday. It’s a Jamboree. My grandson has one. I got one upstairs. We play spy with them. I’ve got one.”

“If you’d go get—”

But he was already running.

“Some luck.” Peabody studied the disc. “If the boy really did plant it there, if he’s got the toy with him, it could be a break.”

“And she either doesn’t know what it is, or doesn’t know he has it. Get another team of sweepers on the garage and the vehicle, and let’s get a copy of the security feed from Francis. She didn’t take them far. She must have a place, a place she can keep two kids

under wraps. Close by so she could case the house, get a sense of their routine maybe. That means she's got money enough to buy or rent. Where'd she get it?"

She stopped when Francis, breath heaving, ran back. Panting, he pushed a colorful little PPC into Eve's hand.

"You should sit down, Mr. Francis." Peabody steered him back so he could at least lean against the trunk of a bright red Urban Mini. "Catch your breath."

Eve fiddled with the toy a moment, searching for controls, power, then slid the disc in.

Giggling burst out, followed by singing—young voices, a boy and a girl. Eve felt her bubble of hope pop. It looked like Peabody had been right.

Then an adult voice cut through, laughing as well.

"Bedtime, you goofies! Henry, time to put that away."

"That's Darcia," Francis murmured.

There was some negotiating, some protests, some begging for a story.

"You already had your story tonight. A new story begins tomorrow! Let's go brush our teeth."

There was a click, a beat of silence, then another click.

"I wish I had a story now." The boy's voice, Eve thought, in a whisper. "Darcia said I could dream one, so I will. Mommy and Daddy will be home soon. I'm going to dream a pirate story. Good night, everybody."

Click. Pause. Click.

This time the boy's voice came on, a bare whisper, slurry, groggy—and music played over it.

"I'm Henry. The evil witch has me and Gala. She killed Darcia. Tell Daddy to come get us. I don't feel good. We had to drink it. It says second. Tell the good witch to come and bring Daddy. Please. We're scared. Tell—"

And silence.

"There's not much room on those little discs," Peabody said quietly. "He probably ran out of space."

"Smart kid. Smart little kid." Eve glanced over, saw Francis still leaning against the trunk. He'd covered his face with his hands as he

wept.

Eve jerked her head so Peabody would deal with him, and stepped out of the garage to play the recording again.

“Smart kid,” she repeated. “You stay smart. We’re going to find you.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

Eve handed Peabody the Jamboree Francis had lent them as she got into the car. “Limited range, right?”

“Yeah. I think probably a couple of blocks, maybe three or four tops.”

“Hmm.” Eve used the in-dash 'link to contact Feeney—her former partner, her trainer, and current captain of the Electronic Detectives Division.

He said, “Yo,” as his weathered, hangdog face came on screen.

“What do you know about a toy—what is it—jumbalaya?”

“Jamboree,” Peabody corrected.

“Yeah, that.”

“Nice little unit, some good features on it. Couple of the grandkids have them. I told them I could make them up something, but they had to have the store-bought.”

“I bet you could,” she murmured. “Can you boost the range on one of them?”

“Don’t see why not, if I had one to take apart and fool with. What’s this about? Is this about those kids who got taken?”

“Yeah. The boy’s got his toy with him, and he left us a message disc in the car the kidnapper used to transport them. I need you on this, and I’m going to set up a command post at the crime scene. I think the kids are being held in the general area. Central’s too far to make this idea workable.”

“Give me the address,” he told her. “I’ll clear the time, bring a couple of the boys along.”

“Appreciate it.” She relayed the location, clicked off. “Peabody, pull in Baxter and Trueheart, and have them bring down what we need to set up at the crime scene.”

“I bet if the boy got one of these for a gift, the girl’s got one. Twins,” Peabody pointed out. “It’s more fun to play if somebody’s got a second unit.”

“We’ll look for it.”

“Maybe there’s a way to find his frequency. We could try to contact Henry, use that to triangulate location.”

“And if we do that when his crazy aunt’s around, she hears it, takes the toy—maybe hurts the boy. He needs to try to contact us, and we need to be ready when he does.”

She pulled up at the house, in front of the sweepers’ van, and drew her signaling ’link out of her pocket. She scanned the text from Roarke as she got out of the car. “Good. It’s good. We’ve got some juice in Sweden, and Roarke’s got some data on the suspect. When Mira comes through, we’ll have a clearer picture.”

“Baxter and Trueheart will put things together and head in. It’s weird working out of the crime scene.”

“We make do.” She walked in, skirted around the sweepers at work. “Go ahead and check the girl kid’s room for the toy.”

Eve did a quick walk-through of the first floor and determined that the living area, despite the blood spatter and pool, provided the best space for the work.

Still, she stepped off into the kitchen to read the data Roarke had accumulated.

“Found it!” Peabody walked in, waving the second Jamboree. “The kids’ rooms are pretty tidy.”

“Good. Feeney will have two to play with. Maj Borgstrom, incarcerated in institution for violent tendencies/criminal acts. She was treated by Dr. Dolph Edquist, deceased, and subsequently by Filip Edquist—looks like the first shrink’s son. He’s dead, too. Open case they’re calling a bungled burglary.”

“Well, the evil witch couldn’t have had anything to do with the second Edquist’s death if she was locked up.”

“She wasn’t. Two years ago she was, by the second Edquist, deemed ready and rehabilitated enough for a transfer to a halfway house. She had to wear a bracelet. Eighteen months ago, a week before Edquist was killed, she walked out of the new facility, leaving her bracelet behind in her room.”

“Well, shit.”

“Two days before his death, the recently divorced Edquist made a cash withdrawal in the amount of whatever three hundred and fifty

grand in U.S. dollars is in Swedish money, and had arranged for a private shuttle to transport him and a companion to Argentina. False identification and documents listing Edquist as Artur Gruber were found on the premises. But none of the cash. Also missing were an estimated eighty-five thousand in jewelry and other easily portable valuables.”

“And another scoop of shit. She vamped the doctor.”

“That’s one way to put it.” Eve leaned back against the kitchen island. “It reads he fell for her, helped get her into a less-secure facility, and planned to run away with her to South America. So she killed him, took the money, and whatever false ID he’d had made for her, and at some point made her way here.”

“Why did she wait so long to take the kids?”

“She had to find her sister. Maybe she started the hunt while she was vamping the idiot doctor. She has to find them, scope things out, get a place she can keep them.”

“How was he killed?”

“Stabbed. Like her father—and like the father, like the nanny, she carved her little witch symbol on his chest. The cops over there haven’t been able to trace her. Edquist’s body wasn’t found for three days. He’d taken vacation time, so nobody was looking for him. She had plenty of time to get gone. Plenty of time to track Tosha and plan the rest.”

Eve took out her signaling ’link again. “Contact Jenkinson, let him and Reineke know we’re setting up here.”

“Eve.” Mira came on. “I was able to reach out to the head of the institution in Stockholm. He believes Maj Borgstrom may be responsible for the deaths of two psychiatrists, father and son, who treated her.”

“I got the second one, stabbed during burglary, with a heavy suspicion the suspect vamped—Peabody’s term—the doctor.”

“The term’s likely accurate. The senior doctor treated her for nearly eighteen years, with limited success. Though during her first few years she displayed violent behavior, had to be restrained or given sedation, she learned to control the behavior. The key is control,” Mira stressed. “And to use that control for gain. More privileges. Though she expressed remorse for her actions, the senior



doctor considered this a mask. His son began to assist in her treatment about five years ago, and disagreed with his father's analysis."

Mira paused. "We'll make a long story short. Less than thirty minutes after a session with the suspect—which was recorded—the senior doctor died of an apparent cardiac arrest. He was alive when she left his office, but there are a number of medications or combination of medications on site that could induce a heart attack. The suspect had spent considerable time in the infirmary, and in fact, had studied alternative medicine while confined."

"Not enough to lay it on her."

"No, there wasn't enough. The younger doctor took over her case and her treatment."

"And had her released to a halfway facility. Six months later, he's dead, she's gone."

"Yes. Eve, there were two more deaths at the institution during her last ten years there. One patient, one medical. There wasn't enough evidence to charge her."

"Stabbings?"

"The patient, yes. The medical initially looked like an accidental overdose, but was ruled homicide."

"And still she gets a pass to a halfway house?"

"I'll send you the case files. In talking with the head of psychiatry, and with his permission reading some of the first Dr. Edquist's findings, I can tell you she's paranoid delusional. She believes her sister's very existence diminishes her, threatens her. Where most healthy twins form a bond, she sees her sister as an opposing force. She needs to eradicate her in order to be completely whole, to reach her true potential."

"Then why not just kill the sister? Why take the kids?"

"It may be to punish, to torture. She has strong sadistic tendencies. She may delude herself into replacing her sister as their mother. Taking what belongs to her sister, as she might a doll or an outfit. *This is mine now.*"

"So they'd likely be safe, unharmed."

"For now. But her sister still exists, and from her sister came the children."

“Yeah. I got that.”

“I want to review all the data I have. It may help us see her, and her purposes and actions, more clearly.”

“Get back to me whenever you have more.”

She went back to the living room to see Baxter and Trueheart working with Peabody to set up a temporary HQ.

Baxter, a solid detective despite looking like a model for an upscale men’s fashion designer, muscled the murder board in place with Trueheart’s assistance.

Trueheart, with his young hero’s face and squared-away uniform, had come a long way under Baxter’s training, Eve thought. She liked the contrast of them, in looks—and the dynamics in how they worked as a team.

“Nearly got the comps set up,” Peabody told her as she worked. “I should be able to rig it so we can use the wall screen there.”

“If she can’t, the geek squad’s on its way.” Baxter lifted a bag. “Disc bag, laser pointers, and anything else we could think of. Nice digs,” he commented. “But why the remote HQ?”

“Our strongest lead is that toy,” Eve began.

“The Jamboree.” Curious, Trueheart picked one up. “Cassie’s little brother has one,” he said referring to his current girlfriend. “Fun stuff.”

“It may end up saving those kids. How far is Feeney behind you?”

As if in answer, Feeney, his suit ruffled, his hair a small ginger and silver explosion over his droopy face, walked in just ahead of the colorfully clad McNab and Callender.

McNab sent Peabody a wink, which Eve chose to ignore. She might never get used to the intimate byplay between those lovebirds, but she didn’t have time to rag on them.

Besides, he carried a tote she assumed held tools of the e-trade.

This would be her core team, she thought. Peabody, Baxter, Trueheart, Feeney—McNab in his screaming orange baggies and shirt of daffodil and kiwi stripes—and Callender, her curvy body snuggled into red skin-pants, and her pockets crowding over a long, sleeveless vest covered with silver stars.

Peabody straightened in her pink cowgirl boots and ordered the comp to print the various ID shots for the murder board.

They might resemble a motley crew, Eve thought, but they were some of the best cops in the department.

“Start setting up the board, Peabody, while I brief the team.”

GALA SAT ON THE FLOOR BETWEEN THE BEDS PLAYING WITH her doll. It wasn't her favorite doll. The evil witch hadn't brought Princess Elsa. But it was good to have Miss Zelda with her.

She was so scared, and she wanted Mommy. She wanted to be home having a tea party with Darcia.

But Darcia had gone to heaven. She hoped they had tea parties in heaven.

Behind her Henry played with blocks. But he wasn't really playing, just as she wasn't really playing. He built a fort, and in it he tried very hard to call the good witch.

Daddy said good beat the pants off evil, so they needed the good witch to come beat the pants off the evil witch.

Gala told Henry they should pretend to be good until the good witch came. Then maybe the evil witch wouldn't make them drink any more of the stuff that made them feel sick and tired.

And she would be brave, like Henry, and sit in front of the fort so the bad witch saw her playing when she came in again. And Henry could hide the Jamboree.

But when the door opened she wanted to cry. She wanted Mommy and the bad witch looked like Mommy.

*She's not Mommy!* Henry shouted in her head.

Crying now, Gala hugged Miss Zelda close.

“Cry baby, cry baby.” Maj sang it. “Keep it up and I'll give you something to cry about, you stupid, ungrateful baby. Didn't I give you cookies? Didn't I give you cakes?”

Reaching down, she yanked the doll out of Gala's hands. Smiling, she took a knife out of her pocket, held it to the doll's throat. “If you cry, I'll cut her head off. Do you want me to do that? Do you want to *kill* her?”

“No! Please, don't hurt Miss Zelda! I won't cry. I won't, I won't.”

“Miss Zelda. That’s a stupid name for a stupid doll.” Maj hurled it across the room, and zeroed in on Henry.

He jumped to his feet behind his fort, and stood quivering, hands balled into little fists.

“I don’t like the look on your face, *pojke*. Maybe I’ll cut your sister’s head off.” She grabbed Gala, waved the knife. “How about that? You’d better show me some *respect* or I’ll cut her throat just like I did your precious nanny’s.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He choked it out, could hardly get his breath.

“What? What did you say? Stop mumbling.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“That’s better.” She shoved Gala aside so the little girl fell. But she didn’t cry. She trembled, but she didn’t cry.

The evil witch smiled as she circled the knife in the air. “What are you doing there, Henry?”

“We . . . we’ve been playing. I built a fort.”

“Is that what you call it?” Lunging forward, she kicked at the blocks, sent them tumbling and flying. “It doesn’t look much like a fort to me. You don’t know how to build anything. You don’t know how to do anything. You’re stupid.”

Her eyes burned when she saw his gaze shift to the knife. She waved it again. “Would you like to get your hands on this, *pojke*? Would you like to hurt me with this?”

Yes, yes! he said in his head, and hearing him, Gala crawled over to him.

*Don’t, Henry. Don’t, don’t, don’t.*

He swallowed hard. “We’re not allowed to play with knives.”

“Is that right?” Deliberately, Maj flicked the knife against his arm, laughing, laughing when he jolted back in shock, when tears of fear and pain sprang into his eyes. “I am! I can play with knives all I want. You remember that, little boy. Remember that, little girl.”

And the most horrible thing happened. They watched her as she licked Henry’s blood off the knife, and smiled.

“Delicious! Now, I have things to do. I’m a very busy woman. Later I’ll bring you something to eat. Maybe more cakes and cookies. Or maybe worms and bugs. Whatever I bring, you’ll eat or I’ll slice off your piggy fingers and toes and fry them up in a pan.”

She went out, shut the door, turned the locks.

Henry looked down at the hand he'd pressed to his arm, and saw the blood. His stomach rolled; his head swam. His legs gave way so he sat hard on the floor.

"It's all right, Henry." Though the tears came now, Gala kissed his white cheek. "I'll take care of you, just like Mommy and Daddy and Darcia take care of us when we get hurt. I know how."

The little bathroom only had a sink and a toilet, but she ran water over the rough paper towel, scrubbed soap into it—because of germs. And she promised she would eat worms and bugs. She would do anything so the evil witch didn't hurt Henry again.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Eve had to block the e-speak out of her head. The EDD team huddled in its corner with the toys, tools, and other equipment she didn't want or need to understand.

At one point, McNab went racing out of the house with one of the handhelds. She didn't ask why, but continued to circle her board.

More than a murder board this time, she reminded herself. She couldn't stand for the dead until she brought the living to safety.

"Money's not her motive," Baxter commented. "It's a by-product. She scammed and killed the doctor not just for money, but to get out. She couldn't get to the sister when she was locked up, so she needed a key, and that was this Edquist. The money she got from him. By-product."

"Agreed. She needs funds to hide, to eat, to travel, to have the time to find the sister. But getting out was primary. Killing him," Eve continued, "means he can't talk, confess his duplicity, and give the name on her new ID. But I'd say that was another by-product. Killing him was purpose and reward in itself."

"She doesn't have a motive to kill the kids," Trueheart began. "It doesn't gain her anything. If the sister is her focus, the kids are a way to get to her. Dead, she's alive and there's nothing to use as bait."

"Kill the kids, cut out the sister's heart," Peabody disagreed. "That's as good as dead."

"That's a point, but as good as dead isn't enough." Eve stopped, studied Maj's ID, rocked on her heels. "She can't win, can't have or be everything she wants as long as Tosha's breathing. But those kids are a living, breathing piece of the sister. The one who crowded her in the womb, who shares her face, her body, who she likes to blame for the death of the mother, who sucked up too much of the father's attention. There can only be one. Now there's not just the sister, but . . . by-products."

“That’s one way to put it,” Baxter agreed. “I don’t know if we’re going to logic this out, LT. She’s batshit crazy.”

“Even batshit has routines, patterns, goals. We have to figure hers out.”

She wanted the case files, police reports. Wanted data.

“She waited until the sister and husband were out of town,” Eve continued. “That says she didn’t go directly for the sister. She had the element of concealment, of surprise. But instead of going at the sister when she was, say, taking a walk, doing some shopping, heading to work, she waits, then takes the kids.”

“So she wanted the kids more than she wanted the sister dead?” Peabody suggested.

Too simple, Eve thought. And too rational. “No. She wants them all dead.”

“We got damn near a mile,” Feeney called out. “McNab’s out eleven blocks, and we’re getting a weak signal. That’s more than triple the standard range.”

“She could be farther out, but the probability is she’s within a mile.” Eve crossed to their workstation. “She needed the car. She couldn’t stroll along even a couple blocks with two drugged kids and their stuff. Too much to handle, too big a chance to be seen, remembered. What are a couple of kids doing walking around after midnight?”

“And she brought the car back.” Eve paced away, paced back. “The time line presents she drove the kids to her secure location, locked them up, drove the car back to the garage, logging in roughly twenty-three minutes after she exited the house with the kids.”

“I’d put the drive time between five and eight minutes. She’d need the rest of the time to haul the kids inside, secure them.”

Eve nodded at Feeney. “So close, most likely within that mile. How do you find the kid’s signal?”

Feeney rubbed his face, the back of his neck. “We’re going to open up. We’ll pick up a lot of signals from anybody using one of these things, but we’ll filter it out. The problem is, we’ve got the booster, so we can pick up. But the kid’s unit doesn’t have it, so its signal is limited. It’s just a toy, Dallas,” he continued. “Enhancing on this end’s going to help us pick him up, but he’s still just got a toy in his hand.”

She turned her circle, tried to think. And asked herself if she was putting too much time and effort, too much hope into a damn toy. “What if we could trace the exact unit. We find out when and where it was purchased, see if we can get the schematics on the exact unit.”

“They’re all pretty much the same. They’re mass-produced. It is what it is, Dallas.” Feeney pulled a wrinkled bag of candied almonds out of his pocket, popped a couple. “We took this one apart, so we know how it works, how it’s put together. Maybe if we talked to the designer, I don’t know, we’d have a brainstorm, but—”

“Why not? We can try it. Who makes it?”

“It’s Kidware. That’s Roarke’s.” His ginger eyebrows arched. “I figured you knew.”

“How would I know?” She pulled out her ’link, then paused as the door opened. McNab stepped in. And HSO Agent Teasdale and a whip-thin man in a bad black suit came in behind him.

“Tag him,” she snapped to Feeney. “Agent Teasdale.”

“Lieutenant.” In her calm, precise way, Teasdale gestured to the man beside her. “This is Agent Slattery with the FBI. We’ve been fully briefed on the situation, and will be conducting a joint agency investigation.”

Eve kept her tone and gaze even. “Okay.”

“The priority of our part of the investigation will be the kidnapping. I’m sure we agree the safety of the children, and their quick return, is the most vital goal.”

“No argument. Our e-team has boosted the range of the toy—the same toy we believe Henry MacDermitt has in his possession—to nearly a mile radius. We’ll attempt to intercept any transmissions or communications he makes, and use that to triangulate his and his sister’s location.”

“That’s excellent, though we can’t know if he still has his unit, or the opportunity and wherewithal to attempt a transmission.”

“He was smart enough to make a recording when he was drugged and being kidnapped, after he saw the nanny who was part of his family dead on the floor. I think he’s smart enough to keep the unit hidden, and to keep trying.”

“To reach the good witch.” Teasdale nodded. “Fully briefed, as I said. He’s just a child, but yes, I agree, a smart one.”



“There’s still been no communication or demand for ransom from the abductor?” Slattery asked.

“None. I have two men with the MacDermits, in a safe house downtown. . . . Can I have a moment, Agent Teasdale?”

“Of course.”

Eve led the way into the kitchen, paused to assess the woman she’d learned to trust during another investigation. Deceptively slight in built, cool, enigmatic Asian eyes. “Listen, I’m not trying to shut you out.”

“I think we understand each other, and should, given our past collaboration.”

“Good. Is he solid, Slattery?”

“Very, and he has considerably more experience than I with kidnappings, particularly with minors.”

“I don’t know if she’s going to try for ransom, but at some point she has to communicate with her sister. She’d need to gloat, to twist the knife.”

“I agree.”

“I could use my men here, Teasdale, that’s a fact. And another is, I think you and Slattery are better suited to deal with parents, to be on top of it when the sister contacts them. She will. She has to. She may try to lure the sister out.”

Teasdale inclined her head in the slightest nod. “Because she doesn’t just want all of them dead, she needs all of them dead.”

“That’s how I see it, yeah. My men are good, and if you weren’t on tap, I’d trust them to see that end through. But you are, and I think you’d do better. Constant communication, complete open line. My word on it.”

“I don’t doubt your word, and don’t need it. I understand your priorities, and shutting out valuable assistance isn’t one of them. We’ll take the parents, but we’ll move them to one of the federal safe houses, locate them back uptown. I want to be closer, geographically.”

“Good enough.”

“The director is in contact with the Swedish authorities, and Global. It’s obvious the investigation into Maj Borgstrom’s escape,

and the murder of Dr. Filip Edquist—the possible foul play in the death of Dr. Dolph Edquist—were badly bungled. We'll find out why.”

“Even better.”

“She won't keep them alive long.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Children are . . . work. Even frightened children who may be cowed into obedience take time and effort. She may kill one. It's how I would handle it.”

Eve jammed her hands in her pockets, nodded. “Yeah, I was thinking the same.”

“Kill one—halving the time and effort—and allowing her to send proof of life and death to her sister. Bring grief, panic, and a desperation to save the remaining child.”

“And it's a hell of a scenario.”

“It's also a logical one.”

“From my take, too. Let's hope she isn't logical.”

But the idea weighed on her.

She thought of Stella, the woman who'd given birth to her. If she'd been left alone with Stella, she'd never have survived. Too much time and effort, as Teasdale said. Richard Troy, her biological father, had kept her alive. It hadn't stopped him from hurting her, raping her, torturing her—but he'd kept her alive because he'd seen her as an investment.

Which direction would Maj Borgstrom take?

She went back into the living area. “Listen up. Teasdale and Slattery will take over for Jenkinson and Reineke. Peabody, contact them, let them know—and tell them to pick up two more of those toys on their way here. We'll keep communication open and complete between our team and the agents. Everything we know, they know.”

“Agent Slattery and I will afford your team the same cooperation,” Teasdale added. “We'll move the MacDermites to a safe house in this area, to aid in that cooperation. We are, even now, in contact with Global re the suspect, and any and all information gleaned from that will be shared.”

“I'd like to have one of those boosted units,” Slattery said. “Our location will mean we may be able to pick up a signal.”

“Feeney, show Agent Slattery how that thing works. Peabody, have Jenkinson pick up four of those things. We’ll get a second one to you,” she told Teasdale.

“Callender will show you,” Feeney told Slattery, as he rose and moved over to Eve. “Roarke’s going to get us more data. I don’t know if it’ll add much, but we’ll have it. And he’s coming in.”

“I don’t—”

“I can use him,” Feeney interrupted. “Another big brain wired for e-work. And it’s his toy, Dallas. She’s had those kids better than fifteen hours now, and not a peep out of her.”

“Okay. You need him, you’ve got him. Right now, Baxter, take the unit we have left, take a walk. We’re going to cover the mile radius continually. The kid’s going to try to reach out sometime.”

HE ALREADY HAD, ONCE FROM INSIDE THE FORT, AND AGAIN after Gala tended to his cut. They didn’t have medicine or bandages like at home, but he’d remembered playing war with Daddy. Daddy had been wounded in a battle and showed Henry how to tie a cloth around his arm. He said it was a field dress. It didn’t make sense because it didn’t look like a dress. But the cut felt better when Gala tied a towel around it.

He was afraid she’d cut him with the knife again, or cut Gala. He was more afraid maybe she was an evil witch vampire because she’d licked his blood right off the knife. He’d snuck out of bed one night and seen part of a vid his daddy watched about vampires. And had nightmares after it.

Maybe she’d make him and Gala vampires, too.

They had to get away.

But no one answered when he called out for help.

## CHAPTER SIX

Not an apartment, Eve thought as she hammered away at possible locations. Not a condo. Possibly a small building, lower-level unit, but most probably a detached unit, a house.

Somewhere she could get two kids inside without showing up on building security, without worrying about neighbors.

Would she keep the kids restrained? That didn't seem practical, and wouldn't explain why she'd taken clothes and toys.

If she bound them, she'd have to let them loose for the bathroom, for food.

"She wouldn't see a couple of seven-year-olds as a risk, right? She's bigger, stronger, and kids tend to do what an authority figure tells them. Especially if they're scared."

She had, until the end, until the pain and the terror he meant to kill her overcame everything else. But Eve wasn't sure it applied for all or most, so she glanced at Peabody for confirmation.

"I've got a couple cousins who could have taken an adult down and left him begging for mercy when they were seven, but generally? Yeah. The adult's in charge, in control."

"So she probably doesn't have them restrained—or if she has, they're still free enough to play—or why take stuff? A room, a locked room, closed off—and she couldn't put a couple of kids in a room near where other people live and work. Windows," she added. "You could use privacy shields, but it's risky."

"A basement?"

"Maybe. A tightly sealed room, probably without windows or boarded and shielded windows. One door's the smartest. She has to have easy access to it. And it has to be somewhere some bystander couldn't wander into. We recanvass, a mile radius from the garage. I want officers paying attention to any single residences, any vacant buildings.

“She could, and likely did, walk around this neighborhood. People were used to seeing the sister, and wouldn’t think twice. She probably shopped around here, ate around here. On the recording, the kid said, ‘It says second.’ Second Avenue? He could’ve seen a street sign out the window. Let’s focus there.”

“I might have something.”

Eve shoved up from her jerry-rigged workstation, hurried to Callender.

“We’re getting a lot of little communications. Kids are out of school. In the listening area, we’ve probably got at least a dozen or more playing around with this thing. But I think . . .” She shook her head. “I can’t hold it. It’s weak . . . and it’s gone. I just can’t triangulate, Captain, it’s wavery, and there’s too much interference.”

“Clean it up, boost it,” Feeney ordered. “Let’s see if we can hear the transmission.”

“Working on it. It’s through Trueheart’s boosted unit. Yeah, I got that, cutie,” she said, Eve assumed, to Trueheart. “Hold your position. We might pick it up again. Let me work some magic here.”

Patience straining, Eve waited while Callender worked a keyboard manually. Behind her, Peabody rose to answer a brisk knock on the door. “Keep the nosy out,” Eve snapped. “Come on, Callender.”

“I’m getting it. It’s like trying to pull a whisper out of a hurricane.”

Then Eve heard it, indeed hardly more than a whisper. *A knife . . . licked blood . . . make us vampires . . . hurry.*

Eve whipped out her comm. “Trueheart, answer him. Keep him calm. Tell him we’re looking for him, but ask him if he can tell you anything about where they are. Anything. How it looks, sounds, smells. Make it fast.”

She heard Trueheart, his easy voice, call the boy by name.

“Hey, Henry, we’re going to find you. It’s going to be okay. Can you tell me where you are? What do you see, Henry, what do you hear? What—”

With her comm open, Eve heard the wavery response.

*A room . . . two beds, no windows . . . make us eat cookies. Cake. Cut me. Hurts. Send good witch, hurry . . .*

“Henry,” Trueheart began, but even the hum of the transmission dropped away. “He’s gone, Lieutenant. I’m sorry.”

“His battery’s low.”

Eve turned, saw Roarke behind her.

“Yeah.” Feeney hissed through his teeth. “I was afraid of that.”

“It’ll hold a charge for about twenty hours, depending on usage, but he’s just a boy, isn’t he, and might not have charged it up recently.”

In his elegant business suit, his mane of black hair sweeping nearly to his shoulders, Roarke shifted to study the board. “I’ve seen their faces all over the reports, through the day. And hers.” He looked back at Eve. “I’ve brought some equipment that may add to what you have here, but the problem will remain, I think, the limitations of the toy he has, and the battery life of it.”

“He got through once. He’s going to get through again.”

“He seemed a smart and steady one for his age.” Roarke smiled a little. “We’ll bet on him then. I’ve brought some other supplies. Coffee.”

“Oh thank God.”

“And food’s on its way—pizza,” he added before Eve could object. “We’ll work better with food in us.”

“Everything’s better with pizza,” McNab claimed. “Hey, Baxter, let’s go out and haul in the new toys.”

Roarke took Eve’s hand briefly, squeezed it. “Well then, let’s see what we have.” And shedding the jacket of his suit, moved to join the e-team.

EVE SWITCHED OFF WITH TRUEHEART, TOOK THE BOOSTED unit. She needed the air, needed to walk.

Cold, she thought as the wind kicked at her. The days were colder now, and shorter. This one would be ending soon.

She knew what it was to be a child, alone and afraid in the dark, in the cold.

Using her earbud, she contacted Teasdale to check in.

“No communication as yet.”

“How are they holding up?”

“By a thin thread now. It helped to be able to tell them you’d captured a transmission from Henry. I . . . Yes, Tosha, it’s Lieutenant Dallas. She’d like to speak with you, Lieutenant.”

“All right. Put her on.”

“Lieutenant, please, have you heard any more?”

“Not yet. But I’m out right now, scanning for another transmission. We’re all working on this.”

“Gala. Did he say she was all right? Did he—”

“He didn’t say she wasn’t. We’ve got cops canvassing a mile radius. We strongly believe the children are inside that area, and they’re both alive and well.”

“If Ross and I could come home, if we could try to reach them ourselves—”

“You’re better where you are. Agents Teasdale and Slattery are experienced.” Terrified parents shuddering over her shoulder was the last thing she needed. “Your sister’s going to contact you at some point. You need to be ready. You need to do and say exactly what they tell you. And you need to trust us.”

“They’re just babies. They still believe in fairy tales, and that their daddy can keep the monsters away. Don’t let her hurt them. Please, don’t let her hurt them.”

“Nothing’s more important than getting your kids back safely. Believe it. I promise you, when we have more, you’ll know it. We won’t stop looking for them.”

Eve slipped the comm back in her pocket, covered ground, circled, backtracked. And stood scanning buildings as the day ended and the long night began.

When she rejoined the team she passed off to Reineke. The home, turned crime scene, turned temporary HQ, smelled of coffee and pizza and the carnival lacing of sugar from the donuts Jenkinson had brought in.

It smelled like cop, she thought.

“Peabody, let’s try what worked on the Reinhold case. We’ll generate a map, using the target area. Eliminate high-rises to start. Let’s look for single homes, or smaller buildings with basements.”

“I’ll get it going.” Peabody took a slug of coffee. Sometime while Eve had been walking she’d pulled her dark hair back in a stubby

tail. “With Reinhold we knew he’d had only a couple days to secure a location. She’s had a year or better.”

“And Reinhold was days ahead of us,” Eve reminded her partner. “She’s only had hours. The kid said there were two beds in the room, no windows. Not that the windows were shut or boarded or shielded. No windows. And goddamn it, I know he’s just a kid and the intel could be wrong, but we’re going with it.”

“Okay. I got it.”

Roarke walked over, held out a slice of pizza. “Eat.”

“In a minute.”

“You’ve been at this all day. Eat. Take a break.”

“Those kids aren’t getting a break.” But she took the slice. “She knew they were away, the parents. She knew the nanny would let her in, thinking she was Tosha. She didn’t have to kill the nanny. Knock her out, restrain her, get the kids, get out. She killed the nanny because it would hurt the sister more, and because she likes killing.”

She bit into the pizza, thinking, thinking. “The symbol—she carved the pentagram into the nanny, like she did with her father, and later with the doctor she killed. It means something.”

Eve circled around. “Tosha—the mother—said the kids still believed in fairy tales. In her way, so does Maj Borgstrom. Her sign, on her kills. Her need to eliminate her sister so she . . . gains power? I think it’s that as much as the obsession with being the only one.

“She’d had enough time to observe the household, the dynamics of it. I say she knew her sister and the nanny had a strong relationship. Maybe . . . sisterly? I don’t know. I haven’t had time to give the dead nanny any attention. It’s not right. It’s disrespectful.”

“Bollocks.”

“It’s not—”

“It is,” he interrupted. “How long had she tended the children?”

“Over six years. Almost as long as they’ve been alive.”

“And you say she and the mother—and I assume the father as well—had a strong and personal relationship.”

“Yeah, that’s my take from their reaction to her death. It hit hard.”

“Is it your take the nanny—what was her name?”



“Darcia Jordan. She was twenty-nine. She had parents, grandparents, great-grandparents. Two sisters. A niece and two nephews.”

And she berated herself for not giving the dead her attention? Roarke thought.

“Would you say Darcia loved the children, or was it just a job?”

“She loved them. The wit—her friend—her statement, the next-of-kin’s statement, the parents.’ Yeah, she loved the kids.”

Because he could see the frustration and worry, he skimmed a hand over her hair. “And wouldn’t she want you to focus all your time and energy, your skill, on bringing them home safe?”

“I know that in my head, but—”

Before she could evade, and knowing she’d object, Roarke pressed his lips to hers. “You’re standing for her, Eve. And you’ll bring her justice when you bring the children she loved home again.”

“No kissing on duty.”

“I’m not on duty. I’m a civilian.” He smiled at her. “But I do see how shocked the badges in the room are at such a display.”

Since work went on without a hitch—or a smirk—she didn’t have much ground to stand on. But the principal remained. “Aren’t you supposed to be doing some geek work?”

“I have done, and will do. We’re on shifts at the moment, waiting for the boy to transmit again. We should be able to amplify the transmission, and clean out any noise.”

“Can’t we home in on it, like we could on a standard ’link?”

“But it isn’t a standard ’link, is it?” Roarke dealt with some frustration of his own. “He’s just the age group, Henry is, it’s targeted for. Too young for a ’link, too old to settle for a unit that just makes noise, just sets off a recording. He can talk, real time, to his mates down the block, or play games—play games with those friends as well, in real time, or run up his own scores, wait for them to have a go.”

“I know Feeney took one of them apart, but maybe you should. It’s your thing.”

“I didn’t design the bloody toy. I manufacture it. He’s more than capable of sussing out the workings, and I’ve put him together with

the design team. All I can do is lend a hand, and a bit more high-powered equipment.”

Frustrated, she thought. He was every bit as frustrated as she. They were combing the area, scouting it foot by foot. Generating maps, poring over data and time lines.

But their biggest lead was a seven-year-old with a toy.

“What else does it do? It records, right? He left that disc.”

“It does, yes. Again in a limited way. He could do a bit of schoolwork on it, checking math and letters, playing match games and simple brain teasers, adventure games and the like. He can photograph or—”

“It takes pictures?”

“It does. Rather decent ones considering.”

“Can he transmit them?”

“Ah.” Realization dawned in his eyes. “If he’s learned how, he could.”

“Okay, okay, we can work with that. Peabody, how’s that map coming?”

“It’s coming.”

“Trueheart, work with Peabody.” She turned to Roarke, lowered her voice. “Can you and McNab handle that hardware for a while?”

“Of course.”

“Good. Feeney, Callender, you need to take a shift on the canvass.”

“It’s been nearly two hours since he transmitted.” Callender rubbed her eyes. “He could try again any minute.”

“McNab and Roarke will handle it from here. Geeks walk, too. There’s a twenty-four/seven market near the southwest corner of this block.” She dug in her pocket for credits and cash. Frowned at the amount.

Roarke barely sighed. “How much?”

“I don’t know. Enough for bottled water, tubes—”

“Cherry fizzy!” McNab called out.

“I wouldn’t mind one of those,” Trueheart added.

“Fine, fine, fizzies galore. Show the photos again. Do a sweep, bring back supplies.” When her ’link signaled, she pulled it out, glanced at Roarke. “Thanks. Put in an expense chit.”

“I’ll be sure to do that,” he said dryly, and handed Callender cash.

She glanced at the readout on her ’link, saw Mira’s name. “Dallas.”

“Eve, I’ve had time to read over more of Maj Borgstrom’s records, and speak to some of the staff at the institution and halfway house.” The concern in Mira’s tone tightened Eve’s belly.

“And?”

“Needless to say, she should never have been released from high-level security. Several members of the staff reported her for violent behavior, lodged complaints. She was twice caught in intimate situations, once with a guard, once with a medical. Both times she claimed coercion. It couldn’t be disproved, and the staff involved were fired.”

“Bartering sex for privilege. That’s nothing new in or out of a cage.”

“In the second instance, security was alerted when the medical began to scream, when he ran out of the infirmary, bleeding. According to reports she had been performing oral sex, and bit him.”

“Okay.”

“Bit through, Eve. Bit off the tip of his penis, and consumed it.”

“Ouch, and yuck.”

“The report states they found her, face smeared with blood, laughing. Later she claimed she’d been forced, had panicked, tried to defend herself. I can’t say the institution covered it up, altogether. They terminated the medical, and negated Borgstrom’s privileges, confined her to solitary for a week, increased her meds and her therapy. She never wavered from her story. And engaged counsel, threatened to sue.”

“So they closed it down,” Eve surmised. “If she’d been able to get her hands on a sharp or a shiv, the blow job boy would’ve lost more than the tip of his dick.”

“I tend to agree. In altercations with other patients she was known to bite—viciously.”

To let out some steam, Eve kicked a chair. “How the hell did Edquist get away with letting her out?”

“For a period of nearly three years she appeared to respond to treatment. She became less volatile, more cooperative. There were incidents, but in each case it proved difficult to be certain she instigated or was at fault. Even after she was transferred she

appeared to have balanced. She showed remorse, and an eagerness to make amends. However, after she'd escaped, another resident stated she'd seen Borgstrom sneak out at night, or had seen her sneak back in, with blood on her face, her hands. The resident claimed she was afraid to speak up as Borgstrom threatened to kill her. And eat her."

"The kid said something like that. A vampire thing. You don't actually believe she's a cannibal."

"She believes her sister consumes her space, her life, her being, by existing. She may have twisted that to mean she must consume in order to be whole and free."

"Dr. Mira, I don't want to tell these parents the lunatic sister killed their kids and ate them for breakfast."

*Licked the knife*, she remembered. Licked the kid's blood off the knife. Licked and lapped her father's blood.

"Send me everything you've got. Every report, every conversation. Anything you can think of," Eve demanded.

"I'm already putting it together for you. I don't know how much time they have, Eve."

"It's going to be enough."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Eve pored over Mira's data, she picked apart the case files from the investigation into Edquist's murder, and reviewed the reports on the incidents involving Maj Borgstrom at the institution.

Mira's data and analyses were detailed, insightful, offered a clearer picture of the subject. Batshit crazy pretty well summed it up, but with the seriously dicey element of cannibalistic tendencies.

The police reports might have lost a bit in the translation, but she couldn't see where the Swedish cops hadn't done a reasonably thorough job.

On the other hand, the institute's internal and external reports came off spotty and smelled ever so lightly of cover-up.

Still, they all contributed to the whole.

She added key elements into her own notes, reorganized them. Borgstrom had worked in the prison library, laundry, kitchen, infirmary. She'd studied alternative medicine and had bartered sex for gain.

Could she have used any of those experiences or predilections to establish her identity, her location, her revenue stream?

Had she worked in medicine, education, food or domestic services to establish identity, to earn enough to pay for a place to live? A place she could hold two young kids?

"There's an interest in the occult, of the dark and nasty variety," Eve said to Roarke while Peabody continued to slave away on the map. "And her violence doesn't seem random or impulsive, but planned and purposeful."

On a short break from e-work, Roarke downed water and studied Eve's data on screen. "The medical area might be her choice. Access to drugs, a chance to give pain or withhold it."

"Yeah, I'm looking at that. Or one of those wicca-whatever shops. Herbals, rituals. Maybe a combo of traditional and nontraditional.

Peabody! Do a search in the working area for small clinics and witchy places. Maybe alternative medicals. Like that.”

“I’ll add it in.”

“I wonder . . .”

Eve looked up, over at Roarke. “Wonder out loud. We can use anything.”

“If it is shadowed by the occult, and touching on ritual, would the knife she used to kill the nanny be a ritual knife?”

“It’s a thought. It’s an angle. Trueheart! Do a search for any occult retail in the working area, and see if any are open this late.”

“On it, Lieutenant.”

“She used sex for gain. Maybe she’s continued that pattern. An LC license? It would give her unlimited opportunities. Or she may have an accomplice, bound by sex—willing and informed or not. Or may have used one then disposed of him.”

“I’ll take that angle,” Feeney called out. “IRCCA’s my baby. I’ll dig in, look for like crimes.”

“Okay. Okay. Baxter, take it from Callender when she gets back. McNab, keep scanning for a transmission from the boy. He’s going to try again.”

She moved off, into the kitchen. She needed some quiet, some space to think. She couldn’t just put her boots up on her desk and study her board, let her mind shift from point to point, not with this setup.

But she could program coffee, let it all circle around, and try to find a new starting point.

Roarke came in, got coffee of his own. “I could set you up somewhere else in the house.”

“No, I just need to think a minute without all the chatter. And the bopping and jiggling. What is it with e-geeks and that constant—” She bopped and jiggled to demonstrate, made Roarke laugh.

“Even Feeney, a little. He bobs his head around, bops his shoulders once he really gets going.” She got the coffee, frowned at Roarke. “You don’t. Why don’t you do the geek boogie when you’re working?”

“It’s heroic control,” he told her, and skimmed a finger down the shallow dent in her chin. “Inside I’m a dancing fool.”

“Hmm,” she said, and veered back on track. “She plans, and though she’s batshit as previously stated, she thinks things through. She has an agenda, a goal, a purpose, and apparently a taste for human flesh and blood.”

“Always a bonus.”

“She may have bought things to outfit some sort of confined space for the kids. Beds—he said there were two beds. She may have hired someone to put in locks or doors, or to outfit a bathroom. She’d have to know without an accessible bathroom she’d have a big mess on her hands. She thinks, she plans, she acts. We can check on a lot of that tomorrow.”

He glanced around the kitchen, the family feel of it, the wall board covered with bright, childish drawings. “She plans to kill those children.”

“Oh yeah. She’s not going to let them go. But she may plan to torture her sister for a while, try to extort money, more at some point, lure her. Then she’d have it all. The sister she’s convinced is sucking up her power, and the progeny from said sister who would, in her logic, do the same. I don’t worry about her killing them tonight. Much.”

“Then what?”

She stared down into her coffee a moment, into the black depth of it. “You can do a lot to the human mind and body without destroying it. We both know just how much you can hurt a kid without killing.”

“What will she do next? You’re trying to put yourself in her head,” Roarke said before she could respond. “You’re asking yourself what the next steps are. What do you think she’ll do next?”

“Torture them—hopefully just mentally, emotionally right now. That’s bad enough, and she’d enjoy it. She has to contact the sister at some point. Sooner is better. Rub it in, hear the fear and distress. It’s not enough to project it. Maybe she starts the deal making then, but . . . I’d string it out for maximum pain. And I’d want to get some sleep, or at least relaxation time, so I’d drug the kids. Wouldn’t want them trying to pull anything while I was sleeping. Better to put them out, start again tomorrow. Early. Get some sleep knowing her sister won’t. So she has to make that contact.”

He followed the line of logic, nodded. "They'll demand proof of life, the feds."

"Yeah. If she doesn't expect that, she's stupid. I don't think she's stupid. She'll have something."

"We can, and will, track any transmission she makes."

"Yeah, and if she doesn't know that, she's stupid. She'll have a plan there. She won't be at the location where the kids are when she contacts. Why be an idiot? But we'll use whatever tracking we've got, correlate. Everything we get adds in."

Even as she started out, Peabody raced to her. "They're getting something from Henry."

"Are you doing okay, Henry?" Feeney asked as Eve dashed in.

"We wanna go home. You're not the good witch."

"No, I'm a friend of hers. She's right here."

He signaled Eve while both Callender and McNab worked frantically to boost and stabilize the signal.

"Hey, Henry, where are you?"

"I'm hiding . . . bathroom. Gala's watching for . . . witch."

"Henry, do you know how to take pictures with your Jamboree?"

"Yeah . . ." Static buzzed in, his voice faded, wavered back. ". . . pictures good."

"Okay, why don't you take some pictures of the bathroom, and if you can of the door of the room where she's got you? Of the walls. It's going to help me find you."

"It's going to take battery power," Roarke murmured in her ear.

"Just of the door, Henry, and of the bathroom, like from right outside. Just those two pictures right now. Have Gala stand next to the door, and take one. Hurry up, okay?"

"Kay."

"Tell me what the walls look like?"

"Like . . . sidewalk."

"The floor?"

"Like . . . walls. A rug. Toys."

"Do you remember anything about how you got where you are? Anything at all."

"It was cold, and there . . ." He dropped out, chopped back. ". . . window. We didn't have our boosters . . . stopped and made us



drink. It wasn't good . . . sleepy."

"Where did she stop? Do you remember anything about where?"

". . . towers and a star."

"A building with towers and a star?"

"Uh-huh . . . didn't go there. She said drink . . . drove more, and I fell asleep. I . . . pictures."

"Good. Do you know how to send them?"

"I send pictures to . . . and to Granddad and Grandma, and—"

"Okay, good. Here's where you should send them." She gave Henry her 'link number, slowly.

"Not yet," Roarke told her.

"But don't do it yet. Why?" she hissed at Roarke.

"He needs to shut down, better to delete some of the other functions. It may help give him enough of a boost."

"Shit. Henry, I'm going to have you talk to somebody else, and he's going to tell you what to do."

She shoved the comm at Roarke, shifted to lean over McNab's shoulder. "Have you got him?"

"It's not enough of a signal, Dallas. It slips and slides."

"I can hear him fine. Mostly."

"We're boosting audio here, and filtering out all the noise we can. It's the source that's the problem."

"She's back!" Henry's frantic whisper seemed to boom into the room. "She's right outside . . . bathroom. I—"

"Henry! What . . . doing in there . . . fat little pig?"

"I'm going . . . bathroom. I . . . wash my hands. I . . . hide my Jamboree," he whispered.

"I . . . you're playing with yourself, you ugly . . ."

Eve heard the girl screaming: *Don't hurt him. Don't you hurt my brother.* Then the sound of a crash, a wail a second before the transmission went dead.

"It's off," Callender told her. "He shut it off, and that was smart. We'll hope he got it hidden in time."

"Upper East Side building with towers and a star." Eve started to turn, give the order.

"I'm already looking," Roarke told her, standing hunched over a portable comp.

"I found two occult shops, Lieutenant." Trueheart tapped his screen. "One of them's open until two A.M."

"Baxter."

He grabbed his coat. "We're on our way. Let's go, Trueheart."

"There has to be a way to track his damn signal."

Feeney rubbed at his eyes before swiveling around to Eve. "It's a damn toy, Dallas. A nice, well-made toy, but just a toy. It's got severe limits. And his batt's weak. Shutting down the other functions was a good call. It'll help prolong the batt. And if he transmits when we're closer, we could track better."

"It looks like it's south of Seventy-second," McNab put in. "Most likely north of Sixty-first. Probably west of Second. East of Fifth—that's ninety-nine percent."

"Okay. Peabody, let's go with the looks like, maybe, probably. Highlight that area."

"I have a strong possible, a synagogue on Sixty-eighth, between Third and Lex."

Eve strode over to Roarke, studied the image. Two towers, and the Jewish Star on the building. "Yeah, that could be it. From here, she would've crossed Second Avenue—Henry's second. And she would've gone south on Third. Stopped near that building to give them the booster drug, put them out so they'd wake up inside, secured and disoriented. Peabody, put the map on the wall screen."

"I haven't finished—"

"As it is," Eve ordered. "You can keep working on it. See, there's her route." Eve grabbed a laser pointer, traced it. "Going with McNab's perimeters, we lock in above Sixty-first, and with this stop, we'll focus south of Sixty-eighth. West of Second, east of Fifth. What have we got there?"

"A hell of a lot of brownstones, townhomes, upscale retail."

Eve strained at Peabody's assessment, but couldn't argue with it. "If we could get those pictures, we may be able to work out if they're in a basement, some sort of attic, a utility room, something. We might be able to judge the age of the building. Still, we're narrowing the area."

Eve raked her fingers through her hair, squeezed her hands on her skull as if to wake up fresh thoughts.

“She has to eat, shop, probably work. After all those years of confinement, she’s not going to close herself in. I still think closer is better for her. The kid said he got sleepy pretty quick, we’ll figure she wanted that. She’s at Sixty-eighth, so let’s start with above Sixty-fifth. She’s probably east of Madison. Park’s possible, but Lex or Third keeps her easy walking to this place. Let’s play with that. Look on Lexington, look on Third.”

“It’s like following bread crumbs,” Roarke muttered as he sat to assist Peabody. “From point to point, and never being sure if some bloody bird hasn’t pecked a few up.”

“Jesus, it is.” Peabody shuddered. “Two lost kids, evil witch. Henry and Gala. Hansel and Gretel. Bread crumbs,” she repeated at Eve’s blank look.

“Is that where that came from? What happened to those kids?”

“They outwitted her,” Roarke told her, “and the witch ended up in the oven, burned alive.”

“Nice story for the toddler set.”

“Folktales were often brutal.”

“But . . .” Peabody stared at both of them, dark eyes stunned. “I thought they escaped, and came back with their parents, brought healthy food to the witch. Their kindness transformed her into a kind grandmotherly type, and she opened a bakery.”

Eve smirked at Roarke. “Free-Ager version. Sap.”

“But—” Peabody just sighed when Roarke patted her shoulder.

“The tale has another disturbing cross-reference,” he added. “The evil witch in the gingerbread house planned to fatten them up and cook them for dinner.”

“Christ.” Eve dragged her hands through her hair. “Well, this ain’t no fairy tale.”

Eve dragged out her signaling ’link. “Dallas.”

“Teasdale. She’s contacting now.”

Feeney shot a thumb up in the air. “We’re locked in here, too. It’s go.”

Tosha answered, the fear in her voice as palpable as a heartbeat. “Hello.”

“It’s been a long time, *syster*.”

“Maj, please, Maj, don’t hurt the children. I’ll do anything you want.”

“Oh yes, you will. His blood tastes like yours, weak and thin. I’ll sample hers soon.”

“Please, please, don’t . . . How do I know they’re all right? How do I know they’re still alive?”

The room filled with screams—the boy, the girl, calling for their mother to come, to help them. A video, brutally close to those terrified faces, snapped off and on, with the time stamp hitting only minutes after Eve and Henry’s transmission.

“Mommy, Mommy!” Maj taunted. “You don’t even teach them your own language. You don’t deserve to live. Neither do they.”

“They’ve done nothing to you. Tell me what you want, and I’ll do it.”

“Will you die for them?”

“Yes! Yes! Let them go and take me. I’m begging you.”

“Much, much too easy. You’ll pay five million American dollars?”

“Yes, yes, yes. Please. Anything.”

“Here is anything. Choose one.”

“What? I don’t understand.”

“One dies, one lives. You choose. Your son or your daughter? Which little piggie comes home?”

“Maj, dear God, Maj—”

“Five million dollars. I’ll tell you where to send it the next time I talk to you. And you’ll tell me which lives, which dies. Choose, or I kill them both. There can never be two, *syster*. You know it. Choose, or both are lost.”

“Have you got her, have you got her?” Eve demanded when Borgstrom’s line went dead.

“Got her, already dispatching. Feds, too. She was moving, probably on foot from the speed,” Feeney relayed. “Tagged her at Madison and Sixty-first. Locked on there, and it’s stationary.”

“She tossed the ‘link,” Eve said.

“Yeah, my guess, too.”

She grabbed Feeney’s comm since it was handy and open. “I want officers fanned out from the last location, west to Third, north to Sixty-eighth.”

She tossed the comm back, began to pace. "It's a good plan. A damn good plan. Torment, torture. Pick one or lose both. She won't do either of them until she contacts again. That buys some time."

"Those screams were recorded," Roarke told her. "She could have altered the video, the time stamp."

Logically yes, Eve thought, but shook her head. "They're alive. She needs her sister to pick one. She figures she will, she's *sure* Tosha will pick one, sacrifice the other. She'll likely still kill them both, but she'll have destroyed her sister with the choice. That's genius. She's crazy, but she's brilliant."

She pulled out her 'link again. "Dallas."

"We hit," Baxter told her. "Four Elements, woo-woo shop, Seventy-first, between Lex and Third. She's a regular. And she was in two days ago, bought some herbs, a sleep aid, candles. She previously purchased a ritual knife. The shopkeeper insists it's used symbolically, but it's plenty capable of slicing up a nanny."

"Do they have an address?"

"No. She always paid cash, but as far as this one knows, was always on foot. We've got to be close, Dallas."

"See if you can dig any more out, then come back in. Walk along Lex, down about six blocks, cross over to Third, walk back up. She made contact. I'll fill you in. But keep your eyes open."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The minute she was inside, Maj pulled off the gray wig, peeled out of the big, padded coat with its frayed hem and torn pockets. She took the time to remove every trace of the carefully applied makeup, and watched the years fall away. Within ten minutes she transformed from a plump, poor, slightly hunchbacked old woman to young, vital. Beautiful.

She spent some time admiring her face. *Her* face, she reminded herself. Tosha was nothing but a pale, weak copy—one that had to be completely destroyed.

She herself was The One. There could be no other. Tosha was responsible, by her very existence, for the death of the woman who'd created them. Maj had no doubt that had the mother lived, she would have smothered the weak, pale copy in her crib and lavished love, attention, and *power* on her true and only daughter.

Tosha was responsible for the death of the father. With her wiles, her lies, her mewling ways, she'd corrupted him, turned him against his true and only daughter. The copy had tried to make her less while she connived to make herself more.

Who else but that pale, weak copy held responsibility for all the years of confinement, of boring, useless, maddening talk, talk, talk, medications, restriction?

Now the reckoning.

Humming to herself, she unlocked the door to the basement, all but floated down the stairs. At the base she unlocked the reinforced door she'd had installed when she'd acquired the property more than six months before.

Inside, the ugly little piggies slept, taken deep into nightmares by the potion she'd mixed into the fizzies she'd made them drink. Yummy, yummy, bubbles and sugar. She'd made them sweet, sweet, sweet, like the frosted cupcakes, the glossy tarts.

Sugar, white and pure, to sweeten their pale blood.

She could poison those cakes and tarts, she considered. Stuff all those sweet sweets down the little piggies' throats.

But she'd rather slit them. Their blood might be weak, but it would be warm.

Anyone could see they were monsters, tucked into one bed together like a creature with two heads. Monsters to be destroyed, consumed.

Once consumed, their youth, their energy, the power they didn't yet understand would be inside her.

Then, finally then, she would spill her sister's blood and drink of it. Drink deep.

But tonight she needed her beauty sleep. Tomorrow, she thought as she locked the door, Tosha would choose.

Which would it be? she wondered. The girl pig or the boy pig? Whichever the copy chose, Maj decided as she climbed the stairs, she would kill that one first.

THEY WORKED THE MAP, THE DATA, THE PROBABILITIES. They scanned, ears pricked for any sound, with the electronics. They walked, covering the streets, showing the ID photos to any passerby who happened along.

Hours passed with no contact, no movement, no change.

"Eve." When Roarke found her in the kitchen about to program more coffee, he laid a hand on her arm. "Henry won't contact us again tonight. You were right before. She's given them something to make them sleep, and likely did it before she went out to contact her sister. It's past one in the morning. The children are sleeping, and so is she."

"I know it." Her mind circled; her eyes burned with fatigue. "I know it."

"Your team, including you, needs some sleep as well. Feeney's fagged out. You can see it. He won't be sharp unless he has a couple hours down."

She sat a moment, just sat where she imagined the once happy family gathered for breakfast on sunny mornings. Took a breath.

“You’re right. We need to move to shifts. I was just working it out. I’m going to move half to our place, leave half here, then switch out. Three hours, I think. Three and a half,” she amended. “Okay.” She pushed up, started out.

They’d work all night and through the next, she thought as she scanned the room. Cops would. But they’d work better with the break.

“We’re going to shifts,” she announced. “Feeney, Jenkinson, Reineke, head to my place, grab a bunk. Report back here at oh-five hundred. Roarke and I will head out shortly, do the same. McNab, Callender, stay on the e-work. Peabody, Trueheart, Baxter, work the data and the streets. We’ll switch off at five hundred hours.”

“Summerset will see to your rooms,” Roarke added. “I’ve spoken to him.”

“Move out now, get some sleep. You relieve the first shift at five hundred sharp. Anything comes in, anything, while we’re down, I know when you know.”

“You got that, boss,” Baxter assured her.

“I can bunk here,” Feeney began.

“You won’t sleep if you’re here. Neither would I. Odds of anything breaking before morning are slim. Let’s take a couple hours while we can. I’m going to stop by, check in with Teasdale,” Eve told him. “Then we’re right behind you.”

The night held a deep cold and stillness that felt like waiting. Was she abandoning those kids by taking the time to grab sleep in her own bed? She could be back in ten minutes, but . . .

“Stop,” Roarke ordered, and took the wheel of the car. “You could take a booster and stay on it, but there’s no point. You divided it well—sending the three oldest cops down first, leaving the youngest under Baxter, who you know can deal with it. And you’re taking second shift because that’s when you believe something might break.”

“That’s about right.” And still.

A light burned on the main level in the trim town house where Teasdale had secured the MacDermits. Eve used her 'link first, alerting Teasdale so the agent opened the door as Eve and Roarke crossed the sidewalk.



“Nothing since the first contact,” Teasdale told them, leading them through to a living area where equipment covered two tables, and a tall coffeepot stood half full. “Slattery’s grabbing a couple hours’ sleep. He’s the expert on child abductions, so we decided he’d go down now while we expect it to stay quiet.”

“We’re taking shifts. How are the parents holding up?”

“By their fingernails. Tosha melted down after she talked to the sister, and Ross wasn’t much better. Hard to blame them. But Slattery’s good. He settled them down, finally convinced Tosha to take a mild soother and try to sleep. I could hear them pacing up there till about an hour ago, so maybe they’re both down.”

Teasdale gestured toward the wall screen. “I’ve been working with your map. The narrowed area seems most plausible.”

“I want to recanvass that area in the morning, knock on every door.”

“I can get you some foot soldiers for that.”

“It would help. Did she give you anything else on the sister? Any more details?”

“Not much. I got her talking a little earlier in the evening, just prodding her memories. What was her sister into, what did she like, what didn’t she, and so on. But they haven’t been together since they were twelve, so that was limited to things like dolls, sneaking on makeup, baking cookies and tarts, listening to music.”

Teasdale lowered to the arm of a chair, rubbed at the back of her neck. “That’s the normal. There was plenty of abnormal. Putting bugs in her sister’s bed, locking her in the basement, killing the neighbor’s pet rabbit and cooking it. She never told her father that one because her sister said she’d kill her and cook her next if she did.”

“Nice.”

“And it slides in with Dr. Mira’s assessment of cannibalistic tendencies. She cut Tosha a few times, so it seems she’s always enjoyed knives. And she’d sneak in vids and discs on witchcraft—the dark variety—began practicing rituals as a child.”

“Fits, too.”

“She claimed the birthmark was a sign of power and legitimacy. It proved she was The One—that’s capped, like a title. Overall, Tosha’s

memories are general and unpleasant. I don't know if she can give us any specifics that will help find the children."

"We work with what we've got." And, Eve thought, wait for the boy and the bread crumbs. "I'll be back on at oh-five hundred. Baxter's in charge at the temp HQ, but I'm on if anything happens."

"She plans to kill them both, but she won't move forward until she contacts Tosha again, gets her answer."

"Does she have one?"

"Of course not." A hint of pity eked through Teasdale's voice. "So we'd better find the children before the next contact."

"We hit the streets again, full force, first light."

"I'll have men here, ready to assist."

And that, Eve thought, was the best they could do.

She didn't speak on the short drive home, and Roarke let her be. The house he'd built stood silhouetted against the black sky, as still as the night around it.

But he took her hand when they got out of the car. "You're going to find them."

"We could use some more bread crumbs."

"We'll hunt for them as well. He's a clever boy, Eve, and his sister seems brave and true. You heard her voice when she shouted not to hurt her brother. There was fear there, but fierceness as well."

She nodded as they went in, started up the stairs. She'd heard Maj Borgstrom's voice, too, she thought. There she'd heard madness, and a horrible kind of glee.

The fat cat sprawled snoring across the wide bed, and that was a kind of welcome. She'd stretch out, Eve told herself. Clear her mind, and circle back to the beginning. Somewhere from start to now, had to be answers. But when she slid into bed, when Galahad moved his considerable weight to lie across her feet, when Roarke's arm curled around her, she dropped instantly into sleep.

And quickly into dreams.

THE ROOM IN DALLAS THAT LIVED IN HER NIGHTMARES had windows. She could see out if she wanted, to the dirty red light that

flashed on, off, on, off. It was a cold and hungry place, a place of fear and pain.

The children with their bright red hair and pale faces sat at a table full of cookies and cakes and bubbling drinks. And they watched her with frightened eyes.

“Don’t eat any of that,” she told them.

“She makes us. She’ll make you eat, too, before she eats you.”

“We’re going to get out. I’m going to get you out.”

“The door’s locked.”

She tried to break it down, but she was just a child herself, only eight, and cold, hungry, scared.

“We have to have a tea party,” the little girl told her. “She said. And if we don’t eat it all she’ll make us sorry. She made Darcia sorry. She made her dead. See?”

The nanny lay on the floor, soaked in her own blood. “She’s not paying any attention to me.” Darcia sighed and bled. “I’m not important enough.”

“That’s not true. But I can’t help you until I help them.”

“I’m too dead to help. We’ll all be dead soon if you don’t *do* something.”

“I’m trying. I don’t know where they are. Pigeons must’ve eaten the bread crumbs.”

“You only have to look in the right place.” And Darcia turned her head and sightless eyes away.

“The good witch is supposed to fight the bad witch and win. We’re supposed to go home to Mommy and Daddy and live happily ever after. You’re supposed to protect us.”

“I will. I’m going to. I’m trying.”

Something banged on the door. Something huge.

“She’s coming.” Tears running free, both children stuffed their mouths with cakes and cookies. “You have to eat or she’ll hurt us.”

Monster at the door, Eve thought. But which monster? Hers or theirs? And did it matter. Either brought death.

But she stepped forward, shivering in the cold, to shield the other children and make her stand.

“Here now, here, Eve, you’re freezing.”

She shuddered her way out of the dream, into his enfolding arms. "It's cold in the room. I can never get warm."

"Just a dream, baby. Only a dream. I'll get the fire on."

"No, no, just hold on. I don't know which. Troy or Borgstrom. I have to fight the monster."

"Shh. A dream. It's done now. I'm right here. You're safe."

"Not me. The kids. How come I can't find them when they're right there?" She gripped him hard. "Hold on to me, will you?"

"Always."

"I'm not going to be afraid. I can't be."

When she lifted her mouth to his, he met the kiss gently while he ran soothing hands up and down her back. And murmured to her words of comfort.

She wouldn't be afraid, she thought again. She wouldn't let the torments of her childhood damage what she'd become or stop her from doing what she had to do. What she would do.

And here, with him, she knew the ease of his faith in her, his love, and his unwavering trust.

She warmed, degree by degree, and the room—her prison, the prison of two innocent children—faded away.

She was home.

She needed, he knew, the human touch. His touch. It humbled him that she found strength there. That what they found in each other steadied them both. Soft here, and tender, to reaffirm who they were, what they'd beaten back. And would always beat back together.

She rose to him on a sigh, quiet as the night. He filled her, murmuring of love, of promise.

They held tight, moving in the dark toward solace.

When they were still again, when she could count the beats of his heart against hers, she had no fear of what stood behind the door.

"I only have to look in one place. The nanny said that, in my dream."

"True, but not simple."

"Henry said the walls and floor were like sidewalk. So some sort of concrete? That says basement to me. She couldn't lock them up anywhere someone else could access, so it takes it back to her

having the building, or at least the only access to that area. It's going to be a smallish building, a limited or no tenant situation."

He raised his head. "You're not going back to sleep."

"Sorry."

"You've more than an hour yet before you need to get ready to take your shift."

"I need to go back, Roarke. Grab a shower, some coffee, go back, walk around. I want to believe I'll know the place when I see it. I know that's stupid, but I want to believe it. So I have to go back, walk around, look for the damn bread crumbs."

"Then that's what we'll do."

## CHAPTER NINE

Streetlamps pooled light on sidewalks, and a single cab rumbled down the street. The rest stayed quiet, with that almost eerie stillness playing along Eve's skin like a tripped nerve.

"Midnight may be the witching hour," Roarke said as they got out of the car in front of the MacDermitt house, "but I think it's the hour between three and four—that slice that's neither day nor night—that's the darkest and deepest."

"All I know is she's had those kids more than twenty-four hours. They're trapped in the darkest and deepest."

She stepped inside, into the lights, into the hub of cops at work. Peabody slumped over her computer, and Callender broke from an enormous yawn and stretch to blink.

"Is it change of shift already?"

"We're early."

Baxter stepped out of the kitchen area with a large pot of coffee. "What?" he said. "No donuts?"

"That and more on the way," Roarke told him, then merely lifted his eyebrows at Eve's puzzled frown. "I took care of it."

"You're the man." Baxter, in wrinkled shirtsleeves, his usually meticulously groomed hair mussed, his eyes shadowed, pulled out a smile.

"Anything break loose?" Eve demanded.

At his station, McNab shook his head. "All quiet on our front. Nothing from the kids or EW. Evil witch," he said before Eve could ask. "Callender and I've been playing around with a scan program that picks up—kind of hit and miss there—the standard signal from the toy then translates it to our code for a satellite bounce. We've been working on filtering out similar signals from the scan. A lot of kid-comms out there."

"That's a good thought," Roarke commented.

“Hit and miss,” McNab repeated. “And the toy has to be on, and the translation has to mesh. We picked up a handful, but did a search run on the locations. Not our kids—established homes with offspring types.”

“We might correlate the sister’s unit,” Roarke began, moving to e-territory linguistically and geographically. “They were purchased at the same time, same place, manufactured at the same time, place, same lot. We could try a splice and lock, then push through a de-babble.”

“Tricky,” McNab decided, but his tired eyes glinted. “And frosty.”

Eve left him to it, turned to Peabody. “Report?”

“We’ve been refining the map, and following it with search and scans on buildings in each separate sector. I’m starting to feel she could be in here, this run between Sixty-sixth and Sixty-eighth, Lex or Third.”

“Why?”

“Just, I don’t know, I keep coming back there, but the probability runs aren’t any better there than the rest of the area.” Peabody rubbed the heels of her hands over her eyes. “I just keep coming back to it.”

“We’ve been able to narrow it a little, Lieutenant,” Trueheart put in. “Eliminate some of the buildings—established families, long-term owners or tenants. Unless . . . the data could’ve been compromised. She could’ve covered herself on it.”

“It feels like spinning wheels,” Peabody admitted. “Except I keep coming back to that more narrow area.”

“Okay, I’ll work it. Baxter, go catch some sleep. Peabody, Trueheart, you’re relieved as soon as Jenkinson and Reineke get in. One of you can go,” she told Callender and McNab.

“I’ve got it,” McNab said.

“I’ve got it,” Callender disagreed.

They eyed each other. “Winner stays,” McNab suggested, held out his fist.

“Fair enough.”

After three shakes of fists, McNab held out two fingers, Callender the flat of her hand. “Damn it,” she muttered. “I figured you for rock. I’ve never done a de-babble on a splice and lock.”

“Go,” Eve ordered. “Grab some food and a rack. Be back by . . .” She checked the time. “Make it seven thirty. Let me see what we’ve got here. Get some coffee,” she told Peabody. “Take a walk.”

Grabbing coffee herself, Eve sat, read over Peabody’s notes, studied the probabilities. Reran them with some slight variations.”

Then she sat back, drinking coffee, studying the map on screen, adjusting highlighted areas in her head.

She read over Borgstrom’s data again, and Mira’s profile and assessments. Rose to study the board, and the map.

When the other men came in, followed by three delivery guys and a boatload of food, more coffee, she stayed hunched over her computer, trying to finesse those angles and probabilities.

“Trueheart,” she said without looking up, “call Peabody in. Grab some fuel, then the two of you go get some sleep. Report back, eight thirty.”

“I can stay, Lieutenant. I’ve got my second wind. Maybe it’s my third.”

She flicked a glance at him. Lack of sleep had leached color from his face, highlighted smudges of fatigue under his eyes. He probably could and would stick it out, but a few hours down would keep him sharper.

“We’ve got it for now. Take the rack, be back by eight thirty.”

“Got some data from IRCCA.” Feeney shoveled eggs in his mouth. “Checked for the results on the way in. Couple may be our girl, but the closest I got is a dead guy in Paris, eight months ago. Sliced and diced—and missing his liver and heart—some evidence it was cooked up, sautéed like with wine and shit, right on site.” He crunched into bacon. “Cops looked for a woman—person of interest —” He paused to inhale more eggs. “Wit statements indicate he maybe had a lady on the side. Wife swears he did, but they never ID’d her.”

“Who was he?”

“Big-deal pastry chef. Did cakes and stuff for the rich set, gave private lessons if you had the money to buy the time. Took him out in the kitchen of his fancy shop on the Chomps de Leezay,” he added, mangling the French over a mouthful of hash browns. “Pulled out half a mill, in cash, the day he bought it.”



“The money, the internal organs. Was he marked?”

“Yeah, that’s how we caught it. Pentagram-type symbol, just over his heart—postmortem.”

“That’s her work,” Eve said, firmly.

“Don’t get how people eat liver, no matter where it comes from. One wit claims she saw him with a brunette, so the hair’s off. But the rest of the description jibes. Five-eight, mid to late thirties, white. I’ll talk to France, see if I can pull out any more.”

“Good. If we factor it in, it narrows her time here. That may help on the location.” She took the slice of bacon Feeney offered her, chewed thoughtfully.

“Reineke, narrow the location search to the last eight months—rent or purchase. I’m going to take a unit, walk around.”

“I’m with you,” Roarke told her.

“You’re probably more useful in here.”

“McNab has this, and Feeney’s here. Two units, more coverage.” He tossed Eve her coat, grabbed his own.

Eve pulled it on, then frowned at the bread pocket he held out.

“What’s that?”

“Breakfast.” He handed her a unit as well, picked up another, and a second bread pocket. “Let’s have a walk, Lieutenant.”

“Feeney, keep it covered,” she said, and biting into the sandwich—warm eggs, crisp bacon, a bit of peppery cheese—headed out the door.

“We’re a couple hours from sunrise,” Eve began. “I looked it up. I don’t see her starting on those kids until morning. Just trying to factor in Mira’s profile, the little else we know, she’s more likely to string this out a few more hours, make her sister sweat through the morning. Or maybe I’m just hoping she will.”

Eve looked down at the silent unit in her hand. “We don’t even know, not for certain, she put them under last night. We’re guessing that, going with the odds. She’s fucking crazy, Roarke. And kids are scary anyway. She could’ve killed them both just to shut them up.”

“You don’t think that, and neither do I. To shut them up she locks them in, drugs them, or just leaves them alone. Alive they’re more exciting. And she wants her sister to choose one of them. One to live, one to die.”

“Whichever one Tosha picks to live? She’ll kill that one first. She’ll figure that’s the one more powerful, more important, and take that one out.”

“The mother won’t pick. They’ll stall.” He took her free hand to warm it in his. “The agents have the experience here, and they’ll have a way to stall it. Buy more time.”

“How much battery life do you figure Henry’s got left on this thing?”

That had been a worry niggling in his brain since the evening before. “At this point, I think no more than an hour, likely less. He won’t have many more chances there, especially if he tries to send those photos.”

“Was I wrong there? To have him use the time left to take a couple pictures he may not even be able to send?”

“Not if it helps you find him.”

“We should separate, focus on Peabody’s hunch.” She paused at the corner. Which way, which way? Where were the goddamn bread crumbs?

“Bread crumbs,” she said out loud. Liked baking cookies, prison kitchen, dead pastry chef. “What if we’re looking for cookie crumbs. She’s making them eat cakes and cookies.”

“Pushing childhood fantasy—all the sweets you can eat?”

“The sweeter to eat you, my dear.”

“You’re mixing your folktales, Lieutenant, but that’s a grim thought. Evil witch, gingerbread house, plump them up to eat.”

“Maybe, and maybe it’s cookies. Bakery. Lives in or works in. Dead baker in Paris, and she doesn’t do anything without purpose. He gave private lessons. Maybe she took lessons, did the vamp thing, killed him and ate his liver.”

“With fava beans and a nice Chianti.”

“What?” She blinked for a beat. “*What?*”

“An old classic line from an exceptional vid. Hold on a minute.” He pulled out his PPC, began to work. “There’s a bakery on Third, between Sixty-sixth and -seventh. Indulge Yourself. And a little pastry shop on Lex and Sixty-fifth—Magic Sweets.”

“Take the first one,” Eve said immediately. “I’ll take the second.”

“You think it’s the second. Magic—pastries instead of a standard bakery. That’s your instinct.”

“We need to cover both, and the whole thing may be wrong.” She pulled out her comm, intending to tell Reineke to pull data on the two buildings, but switched it to her signaling 'link. Grabbed Roarke's arm.

“It's the photos, Henry's sending the photos.”

“Hello?” The voice piped onto her unit, and Roarke's. “Is anybody there? I don't . . . good. Gala won't . . . up. I don't feel good.”

“We're here, Henry. I got the pictures—the door, the bathroom. You did really good.”

“I feel sick. I want to throw up, but I can't. Ga . . . won't wake up.”

“Keep him talking,” Roarke murmured, tapped his earpiece. “Yeah, we've got the signal.”

He circled his finger at Eve, stepped a foot away, and began to talk geek in a rapid, quiet voice.

“Henry, can you hear anything besides me?”

“Uh-uh.”

“What do you smell?”

“The bathroom doesn't . . . good.”

“Anything else?” Eve demanded as she studied the picture of a tiny john, narrow, wall-hung sink. Cheap, but new, she decided. And the door—new again, reinforced—and standing out against the rough gray walls.

Basement, goddamn it. Basement.

“Cookies. She made . . . eat cookies. I don't want . . . cookies . . . Mommy.”

“Okay, Henry, just hang on. I'm losing him,” she hissed to Roarke. “He's starting to break up more, and for longer.”

Roarke shot up a finger to silence her, continued his rapid conversation even as he worked the little toy and his own PPC.

“Henry, look at the walls. You said no windows, but does it look like there were windows and they got covered over?”

“No, I don't . . . I don't know. It smells wet and . . . Grandma's basement.”

There! Eve thought, and considered it confirmed. “Good, that's good. That's helping.”

“South, move south,” Roarke said under his breath. “Keep him talking.”

She didn't question, just began to jog beside Roarke. "Henry, can you hear the evil witch before she opens the door? Do you hear her coming?"

"Gala . . . Daddy says . . . ears like a bat. Gala listens for her . . . talk to you . . . won't wake up!" His voice broke on a shaky sob. "Did . . . kill . . ."

"West," Roarke snapped, turning the corner.

"You hold on, Henry. I'm losing him, Roarke."

"Not yet," Roarke murmured. "Not yet."

She glanced up at the street sign. "It's the pastry shop."

"Maybe. The trace is fragile, barely there. A bit stronger when he's talking."

"Henry, tell me your full name, your date of birth, your sister's."

Roarke spared her a glance while Henry recited, shook his head at her shrug.

"Talk to him," she ordered Roarke, then pulled out her comm.

"Magic Sweets, Lexington at Sixty-fifth. Get me back up, call the rest of the team in, relate to the feds. I'm not waiting."

She kicked up her pace, listening to the boy's voice talk about a magic spell and a brave prince, a talking dragon. Listening to the voice fade, fade, fade.

"His battery's dead. Bugger it."

"It doesn't matter." She stopped, and she drew her weapon as she studied the trim, three-story building. The storefront pastry shop's display window was empty and dark, as was what she assumed was an apartment above.

But she saw a faint backwash of light spilling out of the back of the shop.

"We're going in, and going fast and quiet. Maybe she's upstairs, sleeping. Or maybe she's in the back there, baking up something to force on those kids."

"Closed for remodeling," Roarke said, reading the sign on the door. "You know what you say about coincidences."

"They're crap."

"Alarm? Cam?"

"Both. Let's see what I can do."

"Whatever it is, hurry."

## CHAPTER TEN

“Feeney,” she hissed into her comm. “Can you pull up blueprints on this building? Do we have a basement?”

“Let me work on it.”

“No time. Roarke’s through the security. We’re going in.”

“Reineke, Jenkinson, McNab on their way to you. Feds sending men in. Full team heading back.”

“We’re not waiting. I don’t know the status of the girl. Clear?” she asked Roarke.

“You’re clear.”

“Straight through to the back,” she told him. “Clear as we go. Look for a door. She’d have it secured. And if we’re wrong and some nice grandmother type is back there, we’ll apologize.”

“It works for me. On three?”

“One, two—” She went low and left. He went high and right. Skirting a couple of tiny tables, then a long display counter, she moved straight toward the rear and that light. And music, she realized.

The bitch was singing.

She smelled the sugar—the warm, comforting scent of fresh baking.

A moment before Eve reached the door, Roarke grabbed her arm, pointed up.

She saw the internal cam, the tiny red eye of it. Cursing, she started to ease back out of range.

Too late.

The door between the kitchen and showroom slammed.

Eve reared back, kicked it, reared back again. And she and Roarke kicked it together. She caught a glimpse—just the shoulder, a bounce of a blonde ponytail, before the door to the right shut, clicked.

She started to kick again.

“Wait. A minute, a minute.” Roarke bent to the lock. “It’s reinforced. You’ll just break your foot on the bastard.”

“Hurry, hurry, hurry.”

“Does it look like I’m taking my bloody time with it? There.”

He yanked it open, and together they ran down the steps. She swept out with her weapon.

Damp, chilly, dark, but the faintest hint of light at the door at the base of the steps.

She went carefully, mindful of booby traps, and continued to sweep when they reached the bottom. Roarke went to work on the next door.

“I can hear them.” Straining, Eve caught the muffled sounds through the thick walls and doors. Screaming.

It was their monster, not hers, that came through the door.

She remembered being too late before—a child, just a little girl and the man hyped-on Zeus with a knife. Seconds too late to stop him from slicing up that tender flesh.

Not this time, not this time. Please, God, hurry.

And at Roarke’s nod, they hit the door together.

She had the ritual knife at the girl’s throat, her arm clamped around the boy’s.

She’d trapped herself, Eve thought, in a room with no way out, because spilling blood was what she wanted most.

“Stun me. My hand jerks, she’s dead. Pretty little girl with her pretty little throat slit wide.”

Identical but for the birthmark, Tosha had said. Yet Eve saw subtle differences. This face was leaner, a little longer, and these ice blue eyes held a wild glitter.

“We’re going to hold back here.” Eve spoke with her eyes on Maj, but the words were for her Roarke. “Just hold. Your back’s to the wall here, Maj. If you cut her, I take you down.”

“If you take me down, I cut her. I kill her. And maybe have just enough time to wring this little bastard’s neck. Drop the stunners, both of you. Drop them and move aside. I’m walking out of here.”

“Not going to happen.” She could take the head shot, Eve calculated, but the jolt would slice the knife right across Gala’s throat. No way around it.

“Maybe you take the kids out, maybe not. But there’s no doubt you’re down.” Eve flicked a glance at the kids, hoping the calm in her voice would reassure them, keep them still. She saw the way their eyes tracked to each other’s, held. The fear, yes, fear with the shine of tears, but something more, something intense.

Were they . . . communicating?

“I’ll trade them both for Tosha, my *syster*. Bring her here, and I’ll let them both go. Fast, fast, or I bleed her like a little piggie.”

“Why her?” Distract, Eve thought. If she could distract, just enough to move the knife a fraction away, she could take the risk, take the shot. “Why not him?”

“Girls are more tender. Sugar and spice.” She smiled as she said it, smiled madly. “Sugar and spice and blood. Snakes and snails for him.”

“Don’t you want to know which one she chose?”

“She chose.” Maj’s face illuminated, a fanatical joy. “Tell me, tell me! Which does she love best?”

“How bad do you want to know? You’ve made your choice.” Eve glanced deliberately at Gala. “But is it the same as Tosha’s?”

“Tell me!” In the split second, as Maj’s body shifted forward, as the knife eased a fraction, angling toward Eve in threat, Eve prepared to take the risk.

But the children beat her to it.

Both of them clamped down, fierce little teeth into the exposed flesh of Maj’s forearms. She howled in shock and pain. The knife nicked the side of Gala’s throat before it jerked away.

Eve took the shot, and as Maj’s body jittered, the knife wavered in her shuddering hand.

“Drop!” Eve shouted to the kids, and sprang forward. She led with her left, plowing her fist into Maj’s face, pivoted, grabbed the knife hand, twisting it as Maj slammed the wall and slid, shuddering, to the floor.

“Suspect’s down! Suspect’s down. Move in!” Eve kicked the knife away, put a boot on the now unconscious woman’s back. And turning, saw Roarke had both kids, one tucked under each arm as he crouched to their level.

“How bad’s she cut?”

“It’s just a scratch. Isn’t that right, sweetheart? You’re all safe and sound now.”

Gala pressed her face into Roarke’s shoulder, wrapped her arm tight around her brother.

“I’ll take them up and out of here, all right with that?”

“Yeah. Tell Peabody to contact their parents.”

Eve started to reach for her restraints, but Baxter moved in.

“We’ll clean this up, boss.” He bent over Maj, pulled her arms back to cuff, saw the bloody teeth marks in both forearms. “Jesus, what, did you bite her?”

“Not me, them.” She nodded toward the kids as Roarke hefted Gala into his arms, held out a hand for Henry’s.

“Good for them. Damn good for them.”

“Have her transported to Central, then go get some sleep—you and Trueheart. You, too,” she said to Peabody as her partner came in.

“I really hear that.”

“Reineke, you and Jenkinson take her through Booking once she’s conscious. Make sure she’s Mirandized as soon as she’s lucid. I’ll be in to interview her.”

“I can go in with you, Dallas,” Peabody said.

“I can handle it. Go hit the sheets. You can call in the sweepers before you do. Let’s get this place processed. Everything neat and tidy.”

She looked around first, as men moved in, moved out. The tiny, windowless room with its open closet of a bathroom. Bright toys, the table full of sugary crumbs.

Not like the room in Dallas, she thought, but the same purpose. Terrorize, torture, and confine.

She walked out of it, walked away from it—and wondered how long nightmares would plague the two children who’d been taken and trapped.

She saw them in the stillness and cold, in the murk before day dawned, huddled beside Roarke in blankets some cop had pulled out of a trunk.

She started to speak to one of the officers, but caught Henry’s eye, watched him break away from Roarke and walk to her.



“Is she dead?”

“No, but she can’t hurt you anymore. She’ll be locked up now. How’s that arm?”

“Gala fixed it for me.” He held out a hand, and though they hadn’t spoken, though his sister had her face pressed to Roarke’s chest, she stepped away, went to Henry. And taking his hand, looked up at Eve.

“You’re the good witch,” Gala said.

“Kid, I’m a cop.”

“You saved us.”

“You did a lot of that yourselves. You were really smart—smarter than her. And really tough.”

Henry pressed his lips together where they trembled. “Who did she pick? Who did Mommy pick?”

“She didn’t. I lied.” Was this the bigger fear? Eve wondered. Even bigger and deeper than any blade? She crouched down again. “I lied to make her think of something else. Your mother didn’t choose, and she never would.”

“You’re not supposed to lie.” But Henry smiled. His eyes filled, but he smiled, and Eve thought: That’s courage. The real deal. “But it’s okay that you did. I’m Henry, and this is Gala.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m Dallas.”

“You’re the Good Witch Dallas.”

Henry let out a little sound, a sob choked off, then shocked Eve to her toes by flinging himself at her, wrapping his trembling body around her. Then Gala did the same.

“Okay, okay.” She wasn’t sure if she should pat them, or where. “It’s all over now. We’ll get you home, get you something to eat.”

“We don’t want cookies.” Gala’s voice was muffled against Eve’s shoulder.

“Yeah, no cookies for you.” She tried to stand again, but the little girl gripped her around the neck so she ended up lifting her while Henry clung to her leg.

“Ah . . .” She looked toward Roarke for help, but he just smiled, shook his head.

A car screamed up. Before it fully stopped, Tosha shoved out of one door, Ross the other.

“Henry! Gala!”

The girl all but leaped down, and the boy raced toward his parents, his blanket flying back like a cape.

Eve let out a heartfelt sigh of relief, but didn’t object when Roarke stepped over, slid an arm around her shoulders.

“It’s a pretty sight on a cold morning,” he murmured.

It was, the four of them tangled together to form one unit.

“They’re going to be all right,” Eve decided. “She had them for what, about thirty hours, and it feels like a lifetime, but they’re going to be okay. And they had each other, the kids, through the worst of it. I think . . . I think they can talk to each other, without, you know, talking.”

“Perhaps. The twin bond, and a little magic—of the good kind, thrown in.”

Teasdale crossed to her. “Slattery and I will meet you at Central. We’ll let the brass wrangle where she lives out the rest of her life, but we’ll make sure—the three of us—we wrap her tight.”

“That works for me.”

Teasdale glanced back at the family. “A pretty picture. The kind that can help get you through the long, troubling nights. Good work, all of us.”

With a satisfied nod, Teasdale moved off. Eve started to turn to Roarke, then paused when the family walked to her. Ross held his son, Tosha her daughter.

“This is the Good Witch Dallas,” Henry began.

“Lieutenant.”

“Lieutenant Good Witch Dallas.”

And he smiled, so sweetly, Eve let it go.

“Thank you. Thank you for our children,” Ross said in a voice thick and shaky. “We’ll never forget. We can never repay. . .”

“Vanquishing the bad is the job of cops and good witches, isn’t it, Henry?” Roarke asked.

Tosha leaned forward, left Eve no choice but to accept the light kiss on each cheek. “Every day, for the rest of my life, I’ll say a prayer for your safety, and for your happiness. Every day, when I look in my children’s eyes, I’ll remember you. All of you.”

Eve slipped her hands in her pockets as they walked away. Together, Henry and Gala lifted their heads, smiled at her over their parents' shoulders, and waved in unison.

"Oh yeah, they've got some internal conversation going. Weird. Anyway." She blew out a breath. "I need to go in and nail this bitch in hard and tight." Energized by the prospect, Eve rolled her shoulders. "And you need to get back to universal financial domination."

"It should be a fine day for it. You'll be making a stop before you go in. I'll go with you, then be on my way."

She blew out a breath. "Are we having an internal conversation?"

"I know how you think, what you feel. It comes to the same on some things. I'll drive you there, then get my own transpo back."

"Okay." She touched her fingertips to his. "Thanks."

SO HE STOOD WITH HER IN THE CHILLY AIR IN THE MORGUE, over the body of Darcia Jordan.

"I barely had time to do more than look at her, have her bagged and tagged. It doesn't sit well."

"You couldn't save her, but you stood for her, Eve, by standing for the children, by working to get them back."

"It's what we had to do."

"Say what you need to say to her."

It felt strange, even with him, but she had to get it out, get it said. "The kids are safe, they're home. I'm going to do everything I can—and I've got plenty of backing—to see the bitch lives out her crazy life in a cage. Off-planet, if we can work it. The farther away the better. I didn't forget you. I just had to put them first. So . . . that's it."

She looked at Roarke, shrugged. "That's it."

"Then go do that." He took her hand to lead her out of the room, down the long white tunnel. "Go see she lives out her crazy life in a cage."

She stepped outside where the sun had risen to lighten the sky, and the stillness had lifted with the faintest wind that smelled ever so lightly of snow.

She took a deep breath of New York. “You know, you’re right. It looks like it’s going to be a fine day.”

Since no one was around, and what the hell, she’d earned it, she leaned into him for a quick kiss. “See you around, pal.”

“Take care of my cop—Lieutenant Good Witch.”

Laughing—yeah, a pretty fine day—she climbed into her car to finish the job.