

CHAPTER

1

Goldfork, Colorado

7:35 A.M.

HE WAS READY.

Jim Doane drew a deep breath as he locked the front door of the small cedar house behind him. All the searching and planning was at an end, and now it was time to put the plan into action.

Soon, Kevin. I know it's been a long time, but I had to be sure before I moved forward. Everything has to be in place.

He threw his suitcase into the trunk of the car, then carried his metal toolbox and shoved it on the passenger seat. Then he climbed into the driver's seat and started the car.

"Doane, wait." His neighbor Ralph Hodder was running toward him across the postage-stamp-sized lawn that separated their houses. "Did you think you were going to get away before I saw you?" He was breathing heavily as he stopped beside Doane's car. He was overweight, and even the short run had robbed him of breath. "No way, man."

"Yeah?" He tensed, then deliberately forced himself to re-

lax. Hodder was no threat. He was overreacting. “Do you need something, Ralph?”

“Yeah, I need to thank you. My son said that you were going to be gone for quite a while, and I just wanted you to know I’d keep an eye on your place.” He clapped him on the back. “We’ll miss you. You’ve been a good friend to Matt, a real role model, and Leah and I appreciate it. Raising a teenage kid is always a headache, but having you next door, helping him work on that old car, and letting him talk to you has made it easier.”

“No problem. Matt’s a fine boy, and I was glad to help. In the end, the most precious things we have is our children.”

“You’re right there.” His smile faded. “Matt said you were leaving because you had family trouble. I hope that everything will be okay.”

“It will be fine. But it may take a little while, so I’m grateful that you’re going to watch the place.” He’d better pretend to be concerned. It wouldn’t do to let Hodder know he’d been tempted to burn the place to the ground. “I’ll call you now and then and check on it if that’s all right.”

“We’ll be glad to hear from you. I’ll have Matt cut your grass until you get back.” He stepped back from the car. “You’ve been a great neighbor, Doane. I’ll try to be one, too. Thanks for being good to my son.”

“Take care of that boy,” Doane said as he backed down the driveway. “You never realize how much you love them until you lose them. Believe me, I know.”

But that wasn’t true; he had known how much he had loved his son from the moment he had been born. It hadn’t taken loss to drive that truth home. His Kevin had been extraordinary in every way, and being his father had dominated his life.

Until that bastard had taken away his son.

He controlled the flare of rage that went through him. He could not afford anger now that the game had begun. Everything must go according to plan. All the sorrow and rage must be put away until he had the weapon he needed to satisfy it.

He checked his GPS, which was already set for Atlanta, Georgia, and pulled out his address book. He hesitated, then carefully looked around him before he reached over and unfastened the large tool chest on the passenger seat and flipped open the lid.

He needed to share this first moment of the journey with his son. They had both waited far too long. He drew back the velvet cover he had draped over the silk nest he had built in the interior of the tool chest. "We're on our way, Kevin. I'm keeping my promise."

The empty eyeholes of the burned and blackened skull gazed up at him.

Pain shot through him. After all these years, you would have thought he'd become accustomed to the horror, but there were still moments like this when it hit home. He remembered what a handsome boy Kevin had been and his sweet smile and the way he . . . Tears stung his eyes. He reached out and deliberately touched the skull. "Forgive me. I still love you. I'll always love you." His gaze lifted to the photo of the woman taped to the lid of the tool chest. "She'll give you back to me the way you were." His lips tightened. "And then she'll give us the son of a bitch who did this to you." He gave one last look at the skull before he closed the lid. "She can do it all, Kevin. We'll see that she makes it happen."

He reached forward to the GPS and typed in Eve Duncan's address.



DARKNESS! SMOTHERING. NO BREATH! Can't breathe.

"Hey, wake up." Joe's lips brushed Eve's as he cuddled her closer in the bed. "Nightmare alert."

Her eyes flew open, and she stared up at him. Joe. Smiling. Safety. She immediately relaxed and drew a deep breath. "I'm awake. Sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about. You were just panting as if someone were trying to smother you." He stood up. "I thought you should wake up and get back to the real world."

Smothering. Yes, she vaguely remembered that sensation. Darkness closing in and something, someone, fighting to keep the smothering suffocation away from her. "I'm duly grateful." She sat up in bed. "Not a pleasant dream." She tilted her head. "You're already dressed. Are you going in to the precinct this morning? I thought you had a plane to catch. That Miami court case."

"Later today. Paperwork this morning." He pulled her from bed. "Come on. Have coffee with me before I leave."

"Gladly. I definitely don't want to go back to sleep." She grabbed her robe and followed him out of the bedroom. "And I have to work on Ryan's reconstruction anyway. I made a lot of headway last night, and I might finish today." She passed the worktable and dais where the little boy's skull was placed, waiting for the final forensic sculpting. "It's going well."

"They all go well." He handed her a cup of coffee. "They wouldn't dare not do anything else. You're the best, aren't you?"

"One of the best." She took the coffee and went out on the porch. The early-morning sunlight was shimmering on the

lake, and the air was cool and clear. “And they do not all go well. Sometimes things seem to get in the way. Why are you being so complimentary?”

“What can I say? I’m just a man.” He chuckled as he sat down in the swing and pulled her into his arms. “I’m encouraging you to have good thoughts while I’m gone so that I can look forward to one hell of a homecoming celebration.”

“You’re only going to be gone two days,” she said dryly. “I’ll hardly have time to miss you.”

“You really know how to hurt a guy.”

“I’ll miss you,” she whispered as she cuddled closer. Moments like this were precious. They had been together for so many years, and yet the love kept deepening with the passing of time. “Maybe. Who knows? I might have another nightmare.” She gave him a quick kiss. “You’re my hero.”

“It was that bad?”

She wished she hadn’t mentioned that dream even as a joke. Joe was always fighting to keep her safe, but who could fight against a nightmare? But it was a nightmare that was still with her. She couldn’t seem to shake it.

“It was . . . like a battle. I was being smothered, and someone was trying to stop it. But they couldn’t do it, and I wasn’t sure I could either.” She sat up from the swing. “But you came to the rescue, and everything turned out fine. So let’s forget it.” She finished her coffee and pulled him to his feet. “Now you get to work, and so will I. If you get back in time, maybe we’ll have lunch together before you have to go to the airport.”

“I’ll get back in time.” He ran down the steps. “I just wish I could be here when Jane arrives. I’ll be flying out when she’s flying in.”

Jane, their adopted daughter, would be sorry, too. She was

an artist who had been temporarily living in London because her work had taken off at light speed in Europe, and she needed to be available for gallery shows. She had called Eve a month ago and said that enough was enough, and she was coming home to the people she loved. Joe seldom was called out of town, and Jane would be disappointed not to see both of them at the airport. “She’ll still be here when you get back.”

“But I know you were looking forward to family time. We haven’t been together in a long time.” He frowned. “It’s not as if we’re the typical normal family. I hate like hell to disappoint you.”

“You’re not disappointing me. You’re doing what you have to do. It’s your job. What family is normal except on the sitcoms?” She smiled as she shook her head. “And today they all define their own definition of normal. And what was normal about our families when we were growing up? You were a rich boy whose parents stuck you in snooty boarding schools. I was a slum kid with a mother who never even knew who my father was and was high on drugs all through my childhood. I’d say by comparison we’re doing pretty damn well. We all love each other and guard each other and give each other freedom. That’s awesome, Joe.”

He smiled back at her. “I guess it is. Thanks for reminding me.”

“You’re welcome. I just have to keep an eye on your penchant for trying to make everything perfect. Perfect can be boring.” She watched him open the car door. “Maybe we’ll have a barbecue the night you fly in.”

He lifted a wicked brow. “That’s not the celebration I had in mind.”

“So much for family time.” She chuckled. “You’ll enjoy that one, too. Why not have—Joe?”

He was standing ramrod straight, his head lifted, looking out at the lake, the smile completely gone.

“Joe, what’s wrong?”

He jerked his gaze back to her. “Nothing. Just a—I don’t know.” He opened the car door. “I’ll be back in a few hours.”

She watched the car go down the road and around the curve before she slowly turned and went in the house. Those last few minutes had made her uneasy, and it was difficult to dismiss them.

But she would dismiss them. It was time to forget nightmares and unexplained uneasiness. The sun was shining, and she had to get on with her life. It was a good life, with purpose and people she loved. That was what was important. She moved quickly back to the bedroom to dress and get ready to work on Ryan.

Vancouver, Canada

“**VENABLE PHONED,**” **HOWARD STANG** said when Lee Zander walked into the house after his gym workout. “He called on my cell. He wasn’t happy when he couldn’t reach you. He should know by now that you change your phones every week or so.”

“Venable is always unhappy when things don’t go like clockwork. That’s his CIA mind-set. He takes it as a personal insult.” Zander dropped down in the chair in front of the fire. “Did he say what he wanted?”

“For you to call him back.” He grimaced. “Venable doesn’t confide in me. Not that I’d want him to. I prefer to stay out of the CIA’s sphere of influence.”

“So do I.”

“It’s not the same. I’m intimidated, and you just choose to avoid.” Stang studied Zander as he watched him reach for his phone. Lee Zander was a tall, muscular man with white hair cropped short and a bone structure that was both craggy and bold. His brown eyes were sunk deep in his tan face beneath a slash of dark brows. Stang had no idea how old he was . . . fifties? Sixties? It didn’t matter. He appeared ageless, and he had seen Zander take down men who must have been half his age. He kept that powerful body exercised and his mind razor-sharp. Stang could not imagine Zander being influenced or intimidated by anyone, even a power player like Venable. Stang had been working for him for the last three years as his personal assistant and accountant, and he had never lost his respect . . . or his fear . . . of Zander. At times, he wondered why he stayed with him when the comfort level was always being jeopardized by the uncertainty of how Zander would respond to any given situation. But those moments were rare; when he subdued the panic, he knew exactly why he stayed with him. He’d made a decision years ago when he’d sworn on his brother’s grave that he’d never leave Zander until the day he died. “Venable sounded urgent.”

“He never calls me unless it’s urgent.” He gazed at him as he punched in the number. “I’ll probably need to talk to you after I finish with him.”

“Why?” Stang unconsciously tensed. “Is something wrong? Did I—”

“Why do you always think that something is wrong?” His lips twisted. “You’re brilliant. Everything you touch turns to gold. You give me choices.”

“Then what do you—”

“Venable?” Zander held up his hand and gestured for Stang to go out on the terrace. “What’s the problem?”

Stang had already reached the French doors and was opening them. It was standard operating procedure. Zander never permitted him to be in the room when he was dealing with anyone. For his part, he wanted no part of knowing anything about Zander's lethal business. It could either make him an accessory or a danger to Zander or his client. Neither prospect was appealing.

He strolled over to the balcony and gazed out at the mountains. It was a glorious view from this magnificent house. Stay out of hearing range and just stand here and wait for Zander to finish with Venable and get to him.

And hope to hell he hadn't screwed up.

"YOU TOOK YOUR TIME about calling me back," Venable growled. "Or was it that Stang took his time about telling you I called?"

"I was working out in the gym. He has orders not to disturb me unless he knows that it's important."

"And he was too scared to make a mistake. I don't know why he stays with you. He's smart as a whip and makes you richer than you deserve to be. He could be one of the fair-haired boys on Wall Street if he walked away."

"It's complicated. We have a history. I don't think Stang can decide whether or not to slip arsenic into my brandy. I'm curious to see if he whips up enough courage to do it. You did impress him enough that he told me the minute I walked into the house." He paused. "But evidently it wasn't that urgent if you're choosing to growl at me instead of telling me what the matter is. I'll give you two minutes, then I'll—"

"Doane has taken off."

Zander's hand tightened on the phone. "Really? When?"

"He left Goldfork, Colorado, at seven this morning according to his neighbor."

"According to his neighbor?" Zander's tone was icy. "Weren't you supposed to have him under surveillance? Wasn't that our agreement?"

"We've been watching him for five years. Naturally, you tend to relax when there's been no change in the status quo in that time."

"Bullshit."

"Okay, our agent screwed up."

"Yes, he did. Do you have any idea where he was going?"

"He said family emergency."

"He has no family. He's coming after me."

"You don't know that. He has no idea that it was you who did the killing."

"Doane is obsessed, and he's had five years to hunt for answers. I would have found those answers long ago. I'd bet he's only been waiting for his chance."

"What are you going to do?"

"What do you think? We had a deal. I told you I'd leave Doane alone as long as it was safe for me. You screwed up. I'm not going to wait around for him to come knocking on my door. I'll get rid of him in the most convenient and safe way for me."

"Let us try to find him first."

"No. I trusted you once. It was a mistake. I won't do it again."

Venable muttered a curse. "You cold son of a bitch. What kind of monster are you?"

"You know what kind of monster. You've used me on occasion . . . when the game was rich enough." He paused.

“The world is overrun with monsters. I’m just the one who doesn’t make excuses.”

“Two days. Give me two days. I’m having an agent break into his house and see if he can find the disk or a way to trace him.”

“I don’t give a damn about the disk. Give it up. Why does it matter to you if he lives or dies?”

“I made a promise. This isn’t only about you. I do give a damn about the disk and several lives that are more important than yours. After all these years of keeping him contained, I’m not going to let Doane ruin everything for us.” He added sarcastically, “I know that sounds bizarre to you that anyone would care to keep his word.”

“Why? I always keep my word,” Zander said. “I told you exactly what would happen if you lost track of Doane.”

“Two days.”

Zander thought about it. It would take him one day to wind up things here, and now that he was alerted, he could afford to give Venable the time he wanted. “Two days. But I want to know what your agent finds out. If you don’t gather Doane in, I’ll be right on top of him. No second chance.” He paused. “And find out if he knows about Eve Duncan.”

“There’s been no sign that he’s even been looking for her.”

“But then you’ve obviously been taking Doane for granted all these years. How would you know if he’s gone after her?”

Silence. “And would you care?”

“You know me better than that. I just have to know which way the bastard is going to dodge.” He hung up and headed for the desk across the room.

He was surprised he’d had to nudge Venable to explore the Eve Duncan possibility. The CIA agent not only knew Duncan but liked her. Perhaps he was rejecting the idea because he did

care about her and didn't want to accept the blame for turning Doane loose on her. Foolish. You couldn't ever allow feelings to interfere if you wanted to stay alive.

He opened the drawer of the desk, drew out the folder he always kept handy, and flipped it open. Eve Duncan's photo and dossier were front and center. The dossier was short and concise. Duncan was illegitimate and raised in the slums of Atlanta, Georgia. She'd been raised by a mother who hadn't known or cared who Eve's father could be and been hooked on drugs for most of Eve's childhood. That hadn't stopped Eve from becoming one of the foremost forensic sculptors in the world and in demand by every law-enforcement authority in the U.S. Her career had been motivated by the kidnapping and murder of her daughter, Bonnie, when the child was only seven years old. She had only recently discovered the child's body and the person responsible for her abduction and death.

And Zander could see in her face the pain and endurance that had been the result of that agonizing search. Eve Duncan was not a beautiful woman, but her features were interesting, and her hazel eyes gazed out of the photo with directness and boldness as if to challenge the world.

But she did not have to fight that world alone. She might be queen of her particular world, but she had two knights who were always on guard.

He had placed two other photos and brief dossiers on either side of Eve Duncan's. Joe Quinn, her lover, whose square face and tea-colored eyes reflected both strength and intelligence, and Jane MacGuire, Eve's adopted daughter, who was far more beautiful than Eve and reputedly just as strong. It was always Zander's procedure to surround the target with the paths to get to them so that he could study the possibilities. In

this case, Quinn and MacGuire could be either the guardians to protect Eve Duncan or Doane's means to the end.

If Doane had searched deep enough to find Eve Duncan.

There was a possibility he was wrong, and Doane hadn't made the connection. He might be coming direct to him. Oh well, it was possible he would know as soon as Venable got into Doane's house and looked around. If Doane was on the move, he must have a plan, and he might deliberately leave clues to taunt him. No one could say Doane was entirely sane, but then neither was he. Madness was all in the eye of the beholder.

He stared thoughtfully at the glimpse of mountains he could see beyond the French doors. It would be a long time before he'd see those mountains again. Perhaps never. The Doane problem might make it unsafe for him to chance staying here any longer. He had a twinge of regret before he shrugged it off. He had been here too long anyway. It would only have been a matter of weeks or months before it was time for him to move on. Doane's flit had only escalated the action. He had a keen sense of self-preservation, and it was never safe for him to forget who and what he was. He had only stayed alive this long by recognizing that he was always a target. Someday, he would grow tired and no longer care, but that day had not yet come.

He got to his feet and moved toward the door. "Stang. Pack up all the records and destroy the computers. Move the money to the alternate bank accounts. I want it done by the end of the day. I'm leaving Canada."

"What?" Stang whirled to face him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It's just time I faded away . . . and cut all ties. Do it."

Stang opened his lips to protest, then closed them again. "Yes, sir. Whatever you say." He left the library.

Zander strolled back to the desk as the door closed behind Stang. He looked down at the faces on the dossiers. The premonition was growing stronger by the moment that Doane might have probed deep enough to reveal a possible vulnerability in Eve Duncan.

No proof.

But he would have been a dead man a dozen times over if he had relied on proof instead of instinct.

Joe Quinn and Jane MacGuire. They were the guardians at the gates of the castle that was Eve Duncan. Strong and competent guardians. Joe Quinn was particularly formidable, a detective with the Atlanta Police Department, ex-SEAL, ex-FBI. Totally devoted to Eve. Jane MacGuire was an up-and-coming artist, but she had been trained by Joe Quinn, and she, too, was devoted to Eve, who was more best friend than parent to her. She had been a street kid until she was ten years old, and she and Eve had found each other. The reports on her were that ingrained toughness was still present and had become a force with which to be reckoned since she had left college.

Yes, Quinn and MacGuire should be able to keep Eve Duncan safe.

As long as those guardians at the gates stayed close, alert, and on guard.

Lake Cottage
Atlanta, Georgia

"I'LL BE BACK IN TWO DAYS." Joe brought Eve close and kissed her, hard. "I have to testify tomorrow afternoon in

Miami, a cross-examination the next morning, then I'm out of there. I promise."

"Maybe." Eve made a face. "How many times have you been tripped up by lawyers? They might bring in another witness and put you on hold." She kissed him again and stepped back. He was frowning, and she had sensed an edginess since he'd walked into the cottage for lunch. "It's okay, Joe. It's not as if I won't have company. You know that Jane will be flying in from London tonight."

"Yeah, I know. It makes me feel better but I should—"

"You should do exactly what you're doing. Jane and I can handle everything here on the home front. I'll miss you like crazy, but I know better than to fight the system. And I don't like drug dealers. I want Martinez to be put away for a long time."

"Me, too. We've been working on pinning this drug deal on him for two years. And hopefully he'll run into a rival drug king in jail who will stick a knife in him and save the prison system trouble and money," Joe said grimly. "What time does Jane come in?"

"Eight." She opened the door and walked out with him on to the porch. "And she says this is going to be a long, long visit, so you won't miss her. We'll both meet your plane when you come back." She kissed him again. "So hurry and get through with Martinez, dammit."

He started down the stairs, then stopped and turned back to look at her. "I don't want to do this."

She frowned. "Joe, you're being weird. What's wrong?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. I just don't want to leave you."

"And that's all?"

He shrugged. "I had a call from Venable about an hour ago."

"And?"

"Nothing. He said that he heard about the Martinez case and was glad that we were going to nail the bastard at last."

"Did he have something to do with the case?"

"He's CIA. Not DEA. Marginally, perhaps. Nothing direct."

"So why did he call?"

"That's what I'm asking myself. After he finished talking about the Martinez case, he asked about me and you and Jane. It was more like a casual social call." He added grimly, "And Venable is never either casual or social. He always has a reason."

"But this time it appears to have more to do with you and Martinez than me. So why be worried about me? Venable may be showing up at the courthouse down at Miami."

"I doubt it. It sounded . . . like an excuse. I may call him back."

"Joe."

"Okay, I'm going. Since you're obviously trying to get rid of me."

"Because it's your job." She smiled. "And you'd only get in my way. I've got to try to finish Ryan's reconstruction before I go pick up Jane. Heaven knows, I won't have time once she gets here. She's already set up visits with half her friends from school, and it seems I'm included in those plans."

"Of course you are. You're her best friend."

"Yeah." She smiled brilliantly. "Nice, isn't it?"

"When it doesn't get in the way of your work."

"I can live with it. She can be pretty obsessive about her own work. She jokes about being a starving artist, but she'd

never be anything else. It's usually a good balance." She watched him walk down the steps. "Are you sure you don't want me to take you to the airport?"

"No, I'm meeting the captain at the precinct, and she's giving me a final briefing. I'll leave the car at the airport." He grinned. "But I'll still expect my two favorite women to meet that plane. I'll get someone to pick up the car."

"We'll be there." She watched him get into the jeep. "Call me when you get settled."

He nodded as he started the car. "I'll probably be able to talk to Jane by that time. It will—" He broke off, his expression suddenly serious. "Be careful."

"Joe . . ." She shook her head. "You're the one taking a trip to face the big bad drug mogul. Jane and I are going to stay here and catch up on what we've missed."

"Yeah, I know." He started to back out of the driveway. "Just . . . be careful."

"Right." She watched him drive down the road until he went around the bend. She didn't want to let him go. She had made fun of his unusual concern, but neither of them ever took the love between them for granted. Maybe he sensed something wrong, something that would endanger that bond. You couldn't live your life worrying because you felt things weren't right. That wouldn't be logical or smart. Yet you couldn't ignore those feelings either.

She shivered suddenly and turned to go back into the house. Had Joe's uneasiness been contagious, or was she feeling that same sense of something . . . not right?

Forget it. She had work to do.

She strode over to the dais, where her current reconstruction was displayed.

“We have to finish you right away, Ryan. Jane is coming,” she murmured. She always gave her skulls a name so that she could maintain a connection that would help her with the reconstruction. Her hands moved gently, sculpting, smoothing. She felt the same calming, closeness as she usually did when working at bringing these lost ones back to the world that had abandoned them. It was as if their souls were trying to reach her, tell her, help her. “No disrespect. We did the big work last night and this morning. Just a little tidying up, then I’ll add the eyes . . .”

She had no idea who this little boy, who had been sent to her by the Bloomington Police Department, actually was. She estimated he was nine years old. He had been unearthed in a grave in a construction site, and no one had been able to offer a clue to his identity. Hopefully, once the photos were taken of the completed reconstruction, he would be identified.

And so would his murderer.

Ryan would go home.

And hopefully the person who had shoved him into that grave would go straight to hell.

“Brown eyes, Ryan . . .” She always used brown because they were more common than lighter shades. She carefully put the glass eyes into the orbits. “What a handsome little boy you are . . .”

Birmingham, Alabama

“WE’RE GETTING CLOSE, KEVIN,” Doane murmured, turning on his lights as he got on the freeway. “The next state. I’ll have to

stop once we're over the border and steal a license plate. Venable will know that I've left Colorado by now. It wouldn't be smart to let him know where we're heading, would it? You'd have probably changed the plate before now. And once we reach the lake cottage, I'll definitely have to change cars. Or maybe a truck . . . You were always better at this than I was." He turned on his computer on the seat beside him. "But I'm trying, Kevin. I worked it all out. I won't let you down." He typed in a quick e-mail to Blick on the computer. "In place?"

No answer.

Doane could feel a trace of panic surge through him. "It will be okay, Kevin. It takes time. Blick won't let us down. We've been planning this for months. I've told him exactly what to do."

His computer suddenly pinged. Blick.

"In place."

Relief flooded Doane. "You see, I told you. He's steady. He'll do the job," he murmured as he got on the freeway. "I just have to keep him from killing her . . ."

Lake Cottage

EVE GLANCED AT THE CLOCK across the room—6:10 P.M.

Time to shower and head for the airport.

She wiped the clay from her hands on the cloth she kept on the worktable beside the reconstruction. "Okay, Ryan. That's as good as I can do. No, as good as *we* can do. You helped a lot." Coffee, first. She hadn't had anything to eat or drink since

lunch, and she didn't know how long it would be before Jane got out of Customs.

She popped in a Southern Pecan K-cup in her Keurig. She didn't need anything stronger, and she liked the smell of the brew. These single-cup coffeemakers were a miracle on the par with—

Her cell phone rang. Jane.

"Don't tell me your flight got in early. I haven't left the cottage yet."

"No, I'm in San Juan."

Eve stiffened with shock. "What?"

"I know. I meant to call you earlier, but there was an emergency, and I had to arrange to leave London. I got a lift on a private jet."

"Why on Earth?"

"Toby. My dog's sick, Eve." Her voice was shaking. "The vet in London didn't know what was wrong. Toby's just getting weaker and weaker. The vet can't pin it down, and nothing he's tried has helped. None of the tests are conclusive. He suggested I put him to sleep. I told him to go to hell."

"I can see you doing that." Toby was Jane's beloved pet, half-dog, half-wolf and totally endearing. Eve had taken care of Toby herself when Jane had been unable to have her dog with her, and she loved him almost as much as Jane did. "Couldn't you go to another vet?"

"Eldridge is the best. He's just giving up too easily. I won't give up. So we practically smuggled Toby out of London to avoid all the red tape and took off."

"Toby's not a young dog any longer, Jane," she said gently. "You've had him since you were just a kid yourself."

"That doesn't mean he shouldn't have his chance." Jane

paused. "We're on our way to Summer Island. I'm taking him to Sarah Logan. I just hope he's alive when I get there."

"You're taking him to the island? Did you call Sarah?"

"Yes, she said that she couldn't promise miracles, but they have some terrific vets and a few extraordinary consultants who might be able to help." She added, "Miracles. You know me, Eve. I'm not one to trust in miracles, and I had a hard time believing that the experimental research center Sarah and her husband set up on that island could be all that she said it promised to be."

"Sarah always tells the truth."

"But dogs that are able to heal and extend life to an undetermined span? That's pretty hard to swallow."

"Sarah had trouble herself until she saw the effects on her golden retriever, Monty. She said he acts like a five-year-old, and he's Toby's father."

"I don't care about any sudden rejuvenation. I only want to keep Toby alive and with me for a little while longer. If Sarah's started a clinic on that island, it's got to be a great one."

"And you're willing to close your eyes to what doesn't strike you as reasonable and let Toby have his chance."

"I love him. And Toby's so full of love. Dogs like him should live forever." She cleared her throat. "Do you know that Sarah said that they call the dogs that they have on the island the dogs of summer? She said that dogs should always live in the summer of life. Toby is heading toward his winter, but he's not there yet. Maybe I can hold him back."

"Maybe you can. Do you need me? I'll hop on a plane and be there tomorrow."

"No, we're just refueling and checking our flight plan. I want to get Toby to the island as soon as possible. The island is

only a tiny speck in the middle of the Caribbean, and you'd have to fly private, too."

"And your point is?"

"That I can handle this myself. With any luck, Toby and I will be at the lake house in no time."

"I hope so." She had a sudden thought. "You said *we* smuggled. Who helped you get Toby out of the country?"

Silence. "Seth Caleb."

Eve's hand tightened on the phone. "And?"

"Nothing. No pound of flesh. He just showed up after I'd had the bad news from the vet and offered his services."

"Just out of the blue. I'm wondering how he so conveniently found out about Toby. Knowing Seth Caleb, that makes me very uneasy."

"But you're always uneasy around Caleb. You've been that way since the day you met him."

"And realized he . . . wasn't like other people. For God's sake, Jane. I watched him kill a man by controlling the blood flow to his heart."

"The forensic team never confirmed that happened. And he saved Joe, didn't he?"

"Yes, but he . . . I don't like him around you."

"You're talking as if he's some kind of vampire. He's no such thing. He just has a kind of . . . talent."

"And you find him fascinating."

"So do you."

"Yes." She couldn't deny it. "But it's like watching a cobra weave back and forth."

Jane chuckled. "There's nothing snakelike about Seth. He's more in the panther line. Yes, if I ever do a sketch of him, I'd make him a black panther."

“But you’re trusting that panther to take your Toby to safety.” There was no use arguing with her. Eve had watched Seth Caleb’s effect on Jane, and it was both complicated and reckless. Most of the time, Jane realized how dangerous he could be to her and kept him at a distance. In the end, Jane would have to deal with him in her own way.

And if that deal did not turn out happily, Eve would have to go after Caleb and take care of him herself.

“Call me as soon as you reach the island and meet Sarah. I’ll be worried until I know about our Toby.”

“It will be all right.” Jane’s voice had a note of desperation. “It has to be fine. I won’t have it any other way. I’ll bring him to you. Bye, Eve. I love you.” She hung up.

Eve slowly pressed the disconnect. Lord, she wanted to be there with Jane. Toby was very important to her, and this might be a tragic ending for her old friend. Jane had grown up on the streets and in foster homes and had never allowed herself to trust anyone but Eve and Joe. The closest she had come was that zany half-wolf who had bounded into their hearts and lives and stayed there.

Until now.

Maybe it would be okay. Unlike Jane, Eve did believe in miracles. They weren’t always on the horizon, but there was a balance between horror and wonder. Miracles as well as disasters could happen. Sometimes it seemed impossible when you faced the tragedy of little boys like Ryan, but she had to believe because of Bonnie.

Bonnie, who had been taken from her in the most horrible way possible, kidnapped and dying when she was only seven. Yet she had been permitted to come back to comfort Eve and help her through life. Eve had first thought she was a dream,

and only after years had she admitted that Bonnie was a spirit and accepted her presence in her life.

Accepted her with joy and gratitude.

Yes, there were miracles in this world.

Maybe Ryan would be someone's miracle. "I hope so, Ryan." She turned and picked up her cup of coffee. "I guess there's no hurry about drinking this. Jane may be a few days. I'll go out on the porch and sit down and enjoy the sunset."

But the sun was already down when she went out on the porch. The dusk had fallen, and the lake looked silver-cold.

She shivered and took a sip of coffee.

It didn't warm her.

She felt suddenly very alone. No Joe. No Jane.

She was being ridiculous. It wasn't as if she hadn't been alone before. So what if the only entity she had to talk with at the moment was the skull of a dead child?

She turned quickly and went back into the house and slammed the door and locked it. "I'm heading for a long, hot shower, Ryan. Then I'll come out and pack you in your FedEx box to be picked up tomorrow. Joe should be calling soon, and I'll have to tell him about poor Toby. I'm sorry Jane won't get a chance to see you. She's an artist, and she might have made a wonderful sketch of you that could have led to everyone's knowing who you are. But we'll get there anyway . . .