



“Let me drive. I want to get there this week.” Jeannie held out her hand. “Besides, you may decide to get a feel for the neighborhood around the precinct.”

“Very funny.” Bernie tossed her the car keys and slid into the passenger’s seat. “You do realize the man is dead? He’s not going anywhere?”

“I know.” Jeannie raced around to the driver’s side “I just like to drive.”

Back at the police station, Bernie pried her fingers from the handle above the door and got out. Jeannie was already inside. Bernie took several deep breathes as she raced to catch up.

They hurried down the corridor to a pair of double doors marked *Autopsy 101*. Through the window, Rose caught sight of them and held up five fingers. She consulted with someone whose back was to them, peeled off her gloves, and removed her lab coat.

“Let’s go to my office.” She smoothed her blouse over her sturdy figure and charged away, leaving the detectives behind. “I know my phone message was cryptic, but I’ll explain.” She stopped short. “Forgot my manners. Coffee? Soft drink? No? Okay.”

Jeannie circled her finger at her temple.

“I saw that, young lady.” Rose pushed through a door on the left.

Bernie bit her lip to keep from smiling.

“Sit.” Rose shuffled through some files.

“We’d rather stand. Was the dead guy Philip Major or not?” Jeannie said.

“Yes and no. We knew him by that name, but ...” She pulled a piece of paper from a folder. “Ah. Here. His fingerprints. I ran them through the national database. Standard procedure. All educators are required to have background checks these days.” Rose handed Jeannie the results. “As you can see, there was a teacher named Philip Major, but he died five years ago in Cleveland.”

“Just about the time our guy came to town.” Jeannie passed the paper to Bernie. “So, who is he?”

“I don’t know.” Rose shook her head. “Yet. I’m running his prints against all my databases. Since he assumed an identity, I’m guessing he’s done something illegal, and his ID is in there somewhere.”

What was he running from? Bernie tapped her finger on the report. This made things more complicated. Was he killed by someone he angered more recently or someone from his past who’d found him holed up in their little town?

“Thanks, Dr. O’Leary. Let us know when you find anything else,” Jeannie said.

“Rose will do.” She peered over reading glasses. “Don’t you want to stay for the rest of the autopsy?”

Jeannie grimaced. “We have interviews to do at his school. Besides, I trust you.”

“Hmm.” Rose pushed to her feet. “Go on then. I’ll see you at the poker game Friday.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The door opened, and a tall man with deep blue eyes entered.

“Danny. I was hoping you’d make it back in time.”

Rats. Bernie quickly scanned the room. The only exit was behind him. She arranged her petite frame and countenance to look like a professional and picked a piece of lint from her jacket sleeve.

“This is Detective Jeannie Jansen, and I believe you’ve already met Detective Santos.” Rose gave her a sly grin. “This is my nephew, Dr. Daniel O’Leary. He’ll be helping me here for a short while until his teaching position begins at the hospital.”

“Nice to meet you.” He extended his hand to Jeannie with a warm smile that went all the way to his eyes, then turned to Bernie. “Nice to see you again.”

Did he just wink at her? She narrowed her eyes. “We need to be going. Let us know what you find on our John Doe.”

Bernie avoided any contact as she squeezed past Daniel. He put a hand on the door, and she stilled.

“Since I’m new here, I’m eating by myself a lot. Would you consider joining me tonight?”

Slick. He asked in front of his aunt. She’d look like a heel if she said no. But she had a murder case. “I’m not sure—”

“We should be done by then,” Jeannie said.

“In that case, I’d be glad to.” Bernie clenched her jaw for a second and glanced at Rose. “Maybe your aunt would like to join us?” Two could play at this game.

“Sorry. I’ll be working.” Rose waved her hands. “But you go on. I don’t eat dinner much anyway.”

“If you’re sure,” Bernie said, “we could meet at Little Joe’s Sandwich Shop at seven?”

“I was thinking more like Tony’s Steak House. My treat. It will be nice to have someone across the table from me.”

She forced a smile. Great. She’d have to wear a dress. She hated dresses.



“SUIT UP, MY BOY.” Rose pulled on a lab coat and gloves. “How many autopsies have you done?”

“Not many.” Daniel grabbed a gown from the pile. “But I’m sure I can manage.” He studied his father’s sister, his favorite aunt. A burning pain erupted in his stomach at the thought of all he was concealing from her. He popped two antacids into his mouth before pulling on his gloves. He had no choice, but that didn’t make it any easier.

At least he really was a doctor and qualified to assist her. In fact, that’s why he’d been chosen for this assignment and placed within the hospital while he investigated the suspect.

They strode into a room made of stainless steel and tile, but the powerful exhaust fans couldn’t completely clear the sickening smell of death. Laminar hoods, cabinets, and sinks lined the walls. Three shiny tables stood in the middle. The one closest to them held a body draped in white. Rose led him to the corpse.

“The only thing I know is, our victim isn’t who he said he was.” Rose pulled the sheet back. “I’m running his prints through every database I have. I’m confident he’s in there somewhere.”

Daniel froze.

The man he came to find lay on his aunt’s autopsy table.

“I need a minute.” He rushed to the door, yanking his gown and gloves off as he walked.

Rose chuckled. “I wondered if you were ready for this.”

In a quiet corner of the hall, Daniel pulled out his phone and punched in a private number. “I’ve found him.”

“Great.”

“But not the way we’d hoped. He’s dead.” Daniel thrust a hand through his hair. “He’s been living under an assumed name. Do I tell them who he really is?”

“As long as you don’t jeopardize your position.”

He glanced down the hall. “Got it.”

“Keep me updated.”

He pressed *End*, took a deep breath, and returned to the autopsy room.

“You okay?” Rose glanced at him, her piercing gaze penetrating his soul.

“Yes.” He took a retractor out of her hands. “You can stop your search. I know this man. He was a patient of mine in Cleveland.”

She stared at him. “You’re serious?”

“Afraid so. That’s why I left the room.” He shook his head. “It was a shock to see him lying there like this.”

“We’ll finish, and you can tell me about his real identity.” She turned to the body lying before her and stuck out her hand. “Scalpel.”

Daniel watched as his aunt made a perfect Y-incision. After five years in hiding, the company had received a tip to his whereabouts, sent Daniel to investigate—and someone bashed the guy’s head in. Coincidence? Or was there somebody else looking for him too? Did the company have a mole?

“Grab that pan off the counter.” His aunt held the man’s liver supported in both hands. “And get me a new pair of gloves.”

Daniel’s attention snapped back to matters at hand. No time for speculation now.

After they cleaned up, the two sat across from each other in her office.

“Well?” she said.

He shrugged. “His name is Tariq Ghazzi. Originally from Turkey. An insurance agent if I remember correctly.”

“That would make sense.” Rose scribbled a note on her pad. “If he was Philip Major’s agent, he’d have access to the documents used to change his identity. Anything else? What was he seeing you about?”

“Stress.” Daniel kept his emotions intact. “He thought he was having a heart attack, but it was anxiety. I prescribed medication, and that seemed to take care of the symptoms.” The pinch to his conscience was back.

“I’ll need to call Jeannie.” Rose picked up the phone. “She’ll be glad to hear we have an identity.”

And he’d have to alert his people to make sure his files reflected the story he just concocted. The police were sure to investigate.

“I wonder why he stole Major’s identity. And why he came to Pleasant Valley of all places?”

Daniel sighed. He could tell her, but then ...