

CHAPTER 2



Mac gaped at her.

“Mackenzie Love, I’ve come to talk to you.” The tall, skeletal woman marched across the room to the reception area. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Out of the corner of her eye, Mac caught Sam shrinking into the background. *Thanks a lot, partner.*

“Close your mouth, dear. It’s very unbecoming.” Miss Freebody placed her purse on an end table. “I haven’t spent my precious time teaching you how to reason based on facts just to see you crumble the first time you find your back against a wall.”

Anger rose in a rush. “I’m not crumbling, Miss Freezebody. I’m determined to find who killed Eleanor Davis.” Mac slapped a hand over her mouth. What had she done?

Miss Freebody cocked an eyebrow at her. Then she chuckled. “You’ve grown a spine, Mackenzie. Good.” The older lady sat down. “Hello, Mrs. Majors.”

“Please call me Sam. Short for Samantha.”

Mac feared Sam would curtsy, but she stuck out her hand

instead. Sam hadn't had the dubious pleasure of being in Miss Freebody's class. Her family moved to Washington after she graduated from some fancy high school in St. Louis.

"I prefer Samantha," Miss Freebody said. "My name is Prudence. You may call me Miss P."

Mac and Sam exchanged a look. A laugh was in their future, but not now.

"You may or may not know that I was once a forensic scientist with the state," Miss Freebody said. "I still have some connections there, as well as skills in that area."

Was Miss Freebody offering to help with their investigation? Mac glanced at Sam, who looked as confused as she felt.

"I didn't know that," Mac said.

The expectant look on her teacher's face answered Mac's question ... Miss Freebody wanted to be asked.

"Would you excuse us a moment?" Mac motioned Sam into her office. "I think she's offering her services. How do you feel about that?"

"I don't know. If we find anything that needs to be examined, shouldn't we give it to the police?"

"Probably." Mac hated to turn her old teacher away. She seemed so eager to help. "She's got a good mind. And, although she was tough, I always knew she cared about us. We could use her to do research. If she's willing."

Sam gazed at the closed office door. "A third perspective wouldn't hurt. Would we pay her? We aren't flush."

"Good question." Mac bit her lip. "I guess we lay it all out and see what she says."

Mac opened the door. "Miss Freebody—" She was gone.

"In here." Miss Freebody called from the kitchen. "I decided to make coffee."

“Sit down, please.” Mac took her elbow and steered her to the conference table. “We need to talk.”

“Miss Freebody—Miss P.” Sam smiled at her. “We’d like you to help us with our case. There are a few minor problems, though.”

“Yes?”

“One, we really should turn any evidence we find over to the police immediately.” Sam gave a half-shrug of regret. “And two, while we could use someone of your brainpower to help with research, we can’t afford to pay you.”

“I don’t need the money.” Miss Freebody waved a dismissive hand in the air. “If you want my help, I’m sure I can work it into my schedule.”

Mac and Sam nodded at each other. Miss P officially joined the team.

“Now I’ll make us all coffee, and you can bring me up to date on the case.”

Mac’s mouth went dry. She hoped they hadn’t made a big mistake.

“CONNOR DAVIS FOUND his estranged wife Eleanor at four in the afternoon laying on the garage floor. She’d been shot.” Mac passed a copy of the police file to Miss P. “He immediately called 911, and the police and ambulance were there within ten minutes. Eleanor Davis was pronounced dead at four-twenty that Saturday.”

“I heard all that at the trial.” Miss P ran a finger down a page as she read. “It seems the only evidence against Mr. Davis was that Eleanor was shot with a nine-millimeter bullet, and he had a gun that used that caliber ammunition. Connor

claimed he gave the gun to Eleanor for protection because she was living alone.”

“They found the gun in the bushes by the house. It was Connor’s,” Sam said. “It’d been wiped clean. Even the remaining bullets.”

“Plus, Eleanor left an unfinished text that indicated Connor saw her with another man, giving him incentive.”

Miss P glanced at the screenshot of the text and furrowed her brow. “I am behind the times.”

“And, no one could corroborate Connor’s alibi for the time of the shooting.” Mac pointed to a line on the page in front of Miss P. “That’s where I came in. I found the man who had lunch with him.”

“Creating quite a sensation.” Miss P raised an eyebrow at Mac. “You need to solve this one posthaste, young lady. Your reputation depends on it.”

“Our reputation depends on it.” Sam put her arm around Mac’s shoulders.

“As far as motive, young Connor was the only one who benefited from his wife’s death.” Miss P eyed the two women over her glasses. “She stood to inherit a fortune from her father. It was in Connor’s best interest to patch up their differences, or—” She drew a finger across her throat. “Get rid of her before she had the chance to divorce him. Especially if there was another man in the picture.” She sat back in her chair. “We have a difficult job ahead of us. We must find someone who had as much motive to kill Mrs. Davis as her husband.”

Mac and Sam snorted.

“You’re going to fit right in, Miss P.” Mac patted her arm. “As a matter of fact, we may have another suspect. Mr. Reese told us about a man getting on the train with Eleanor a few days before she died.”

“Leonard Reese? He was in the same class as Connor and Eleanor.” Miss P removed her glasses and stared past them. “Not a good chemistry student, but excellent with his hands.”

Sam snickered. Mac gave her a stern look.

“He owns a garage, I believe.” Miss P polished her glasses before replacing them.

“Do you remember every student you ever had in class?” Sam’s tone was one of amazement.

“Of course.”

“If we could get a rough sketch of our mystery man, do you think you could recognize him?” Mac said. “Or the train depot has cameras. Maybe we’ll get lucky and catch him on tape.”

“I’ll do my best.” Miss P’s brow puckered. “You know, I lost another of my students that day. She had a heart attack. I believe she was traveling—”

The crash of breaking glass yanked their attention to the front of the room. Sam grabbed Miss P and pulled her under the table.

“Stay here.” Mac commando crawled into her office and retrieved her pistol.

Standing inside her office doorway, she scanned the reception area. Her hand shook as she checked the magazine. A breeze stirred the curtain near the front door. She entered the room, gripping her gun with both hands and extending her arms in front of her.

Her heart slammed against her chest as she made her way forward. A rock sat on the floor amongst the shards of glass. She peered out the broken window. No one was in sight.

Thank you, Jesus.

Mac and Sam had taken defense classes with Sam’s brother, Jake. He’d become a police officer while they’d started their private investigator firm. Mac prayed every day she’d never have to use her weapon. This was a good day.

“All clear.” She stuck her gun in her waistband at her back and pulled on gloves she kept in a back pocket. “Someone sent us a message the old-fashioned way.”

“What does it say?” Sam helped Miss P regain her seat.

Mac removed the paper tied to the rock.

“Wait.” Miss P rose. “Do you have any large sandwich bags?”

“Good thinking.” She placed the note in the clear bag. Three heads bent to read what it said.

STOP BOTHERING INNOCENT PEOPLE

“Good.” Miss P slapped the table. “We must be on the right track.”

Mac and Sam locked eyes. What had they gotten themselves into?