

CHAPTER 2



Mac recalled her sense of alarm on her walk earlier in the day. How could she put her sense of unease into words he would understand? In her mind's eye, she imagined the killer lurking in the shadows under the bridge, waiting for the thief to arrive.

A chill skittered down her spine. She'd almost run into a murderer—a much more serious prospect than catching the thief in the act.

"I've been walking along the river in the mornings." Mac faced Jake. "I usually go as far as the bridge and turn around. Sometimes, I go farther. It depends on how I feel."

"And this morning?" Jake asked.

"When I got to the bridge, I felt nervous. Like something bad was about to happen. It spooked me. I turned around and headed back." She sounded irrational to her own ears. How could she expect Jake to take her seriously?

"Good thing you did." He placed a hand on her arm. "Thank God for your intuition."

"You think the killer was hiding under the bridge?"

He nodded. "You could have been ..." He swallowed and stepped closer.

Warmth filled Mac's heart.

"If anything happened to you ..."

A different kind of heat climbed up her throat to her cheeks.

"Ahem," an officer said.

"What is it?" Jake stepped away.

"They're ready to bring the body up, sir."

Four men struggled to roll a gurney up the hill and over the broken pavement. When they drew even with Mac and Jake, they stopped and unzipped the body bag.

"Could you let me see a little more of his clothes?" Mac asked.

One medic opened the bag another six inches.

"Yes. It's him."

Jake motioned for them to cover the body and move on.

"Are you sure?" Jake asked. "Lots of people have similar black jackets."

"I know, but his had a blotch of red, like paint, on the upper left-hand side. My eye was drawn to it. Same as the dead man."

"Good enough for me." Jake rubbed his nose. "It's cold out here. I'll take you back to your car. We need to get this scene processed."

They retraced their route back to the park and Mac's sedan. As they passed the upper lot, she caught a glimpse of the crime scene tape. The morning ran through her mind like a video on a never-ending loop.

"Don't forget the pillowcase." Mac unclicked her belt.

"Pillowcase?"

"The sack he had. With the contents from the time capsule," Mac said. "It looked like a light yellow or tan pillowcase."

“Got it.”

“It’s the reason he was murdered. I’m sure of it.”

“I love how your brain works. See you at the station in an hour,” he said.

“Why?”

“For your formal statement, Miss Love.”

“Oh yeah.” Once again, she found herself in the middle of a case she hadn’t expected. “I’ll be there.”

Mackenzie turned her car on and waited for the heater to overcome the January chill. Should she go home and take a long hot shower, or go to the office and discuss the morning’s drama with her partners, Sam and Miss P?

Hot air poured from the vents, and she closed her eyes. Or she could tilt her seat back and take a nap. No, not an option. She put her car in gear and drove the short distance to her office.

Miss Prudence Freebody opened the door before Mac reached it. “Mackenzie, my dear, I’m so glad you’re here. We were both so worried. Were you walking in the park this morning?”

She should have called them. Sam and Miss P would have heard about the theft and the body on the police scanner.

“Sorry. I didn’t think to call you guys.” She shrugged out of her coat and hung it on a hook. “If I’d been a faster walker, I would have caught the guy robbing the time capsule.”

“You’re kidding.” Samantha Majors ran over and grabbed her arm. “I’m glad you’re slow.”

“Yeah, but if I’d caught him, I may have saved his life because he’s the one found dead under the bridge.” The full import of her words hit her for the first time, and she plopped into the closest chair. A little sooner, and the thief would be in jail, but alive.

“Maybe,” Miss P said. “Or you may have been injured, and he would still be dead. Which is the more likely scenario.”

Mac snapped her eyes up to her former chemistry teacher.

“You are a very capable young woman, but sometimes you overestimate your abilities.” The older woman’s face softened. “I worry about you.”

“I don’t mean to upset you.” Mac shrugged. “I guess I do jump in without thinking—believing I can handle the situation. I’ll try to pick my battles more realistically in the future.” She picked up her purse and moved to the conference table. “Do we have any coffee?”

“I’ll make a fresh pot.” Miss P hustled away.

“Sam, grab your computer. I’ve got some photos I’d like you to download. I managed to get a quick picture of the van as he drove away, and while waiting in the park for the police, I took some shots of the time capsule and surroundings.”

“I’m not surprised.” The petite blonde woman keyed in a command, and her screen came up. “Ready for airdrop when you are.”

The two friends and partners focused on the screen as picture after picture popped up.

“You’ll need to rotate a few of these.” Mac waved a hand at the computer.

“I was wondering what they were.” Sam chuckled.

“Good thinking, Mackenzie.” Miss P sat mugs of steaming coffee in front of the two women. “Is that the thief’s van?”

“Yes. Can you make it larger?” Mac moved her cup to one side and leaned closer to the screen. “I memorized the first three characters, but not the last three. Jake pulled me away before I got close enough, and if I’d tried to take a picture of it ...”

Sam held her hand up. “We understand.” She tapped a few keys and enlarged the photo.

“It’s a Missouri plate, right?”

Her partner nodded.

“I can make out TXS. What do you think the rest is?”

“Looks like BRQ?”

“I believe it’s BBQ,” Miss P said.

“You’re right. It’s a vanity plate.” Mac grinned at her. “Texas Bar B Que. That should make it easier to find the owner.”

“I’ll start there,” Sam said. “After we’ve looked through the rest of your pictures.”

She paused on the photo of the pink marble slab pried from atop the time capsule. A jagged crack ruptured the stone into two pieces. The words TIME CAPSULE To Be Opened 2039 AD were inscribed at the top of one piece with half the sesquicentennial seal. The other half of the seal and SESQ GARDEN were inlaid into the other part of the slab.

Miss P gave a small cry. “Such senseless destruction.”

“I know.” Sam shook her head. “I mean, what could be in a time capsule worth stealing?”

Mac leaned back and stared at her friends. “The real question is what could be in there worth killing for?”