

CHAPTER 2



“Where’s what?” Mac moved closer and prepared to grab Wanda if she fainted.

“The manuscript.” She gestured to her luggage. “It’s not here. Please, if you took it, tell me. I’ll do anything to get it back. My life depends on it.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Mac raised her hands in defense.

“Miss Woods.” Beth stepped forward. “I was with my sister the entire time, and I can assure you she never opened your case.”

Tears ran down Wanda’s face.

“I don’t know anything about a manuscript.” Mac handed her a box of tissues. “But I did notice the man behind you at the train station. At first, I wasn’t sure if he was with you or not. Then the bee stung you, and he helped you to the bench. Do you know him?”

“I didn’t look at him.” Wanda dropped into a chair. “By then, all I cared about was being able to breathe.” She glanced at her purple bag. “Now I almost wish you hadn’t saved me.”

“Don’t say that.” Mac ran a hand across her brow.

Wanda sighed and inclined her head toward her suitcase. “Where did you find it?”

“When you left in the ambulance, I searched for your purple suitcase, but it wasn’t there. I asked the conductor if anyone got on with it.” Mac shook her head. “And then when Beth and I were leaving, I found the bag stuffed in a parking lot trashcan.”

“My life is over.” Wanda dropped her head into her hands. “I’m a dead woman.”

Mac traded a furrowed-brow look with Beth. What could be in the manuscript that would be that life-changing?

“What kind of manuscript is it?” Mac asked.

Wanda mopped her face and blew her nose before raising red-rimmed eyes to Mac. “It’s ...” She took a deep breath. “It doesn’t matter. You’ve been great. Thank you.” She gave Mac a weak smile.

“But—”

“No.” Wanda held up a hand, palm facing outward. “It’s my mess, and I’ll have to be the one to pay the price.”

“Mac.” Beth took a gentle but firm hold of her sister’s arm. “Miss Woods doesn’t want your help. Besides, you have your own problems. That’s why I’m here, remember?”

Mac shifted her gaze to Beth. Her sister was right, but finding out who stole the manuscript and why was like a juicy worm dangling on a hook in front of a fish. After all, that was Mac’s business. She pulled a card from her purse and handed it to Wanda. “Here. In case you need me.”

Wanda’s eyes widened. “You’re a private investigator?”

Mac nodded. “Do you still want me to go?”

The woman examined the card before tucking it into her pocket. “Yes.”

“Come on, Sis.” Beth ushered Mac out the door. “We have our own battles to fight.”

Mac guided Beth back to the car on autopilot. If her sister said anything, she didn’t hear it. All she could think about was the missing manuscript and the strange man at the train station.

She was smart enough to know part of the allure was that the manuscript would take her mind off her own problems. But right now, she didn’t care. She’d jump at the chance.

Which wasn’t fair to Beth. Her sister had rearranged her life in Kansas City to be available for Mac. She shot a look Beth’s way. Mac owed it to her sister to forget about what happened today and concentrate on why she’d asked her to come.

“Why don’t you update me on things?” Beth clicked her seatbelt in place. “It will help keep you from getting sidetracked.”

And wasting her time. Her sister would never say it, but a pinch of self-reproach caused Mac to wince. “Where should I start?”

“Tell me about Greg Sanders.”

Frustration and fear tore through her, and she gripped the steering wheel in a stranglehold. “We haven’t had any success finding him.”

“Is he really Jake and Samantha’s brother?”

“We’re waiting for the DNA results, but we think it’s possible.” Mac concentrated on relaxing her hands. “It’s a long story.”

“I’ve got time.”

Her sister’s calm voice worked its magic, and Mac’s tension eased. “When we talked to Jake’s mom, she told us that before Samantha was born, their dad had a cancer scare.”

“Go on.”

“They weren’t sure how many children they wanted, so they decided he would have some sperm frozen in case they needed it.” Mac glanced at Beth. “You know.”

A soft smile appeared on Beth’s face. “I have a couple kids. I know how it works, Baby Sis.”

“Anyway, the sperm bank caught a male worker stealing ... deposits and selling them on the black market to couples with fertility problems.”

“Let me guess.” Beth gave a slow nod. “The employee stole Sam and Jake’s dad’s deposit.”

“Yep.”

“Where was Greg Sanders last seen?”

Mac signaled for a turn before answering. “His girlfriend, Elsie, saw him three weeks ago. He told her he was coming to Washington for a job assignment.”

“I take it she called him?”

“Oh, yeah, many times. With no answer.” Mac pulled into her driveway. “When she contacted his work, they said he took two weeks of vacation and hadn’t returned after the time was up.”

“So, Greg told his girlfriend he would be gone for work and told his employer he would be on a family trip. Why did he come to Washington? If that’s where he is.”

“If he’s not here, I doubt we have any chance of finding him.” Mac exited the car. “We can’t go traipsing all over the country looking for a man who may or may not be Jake’s brother.” She pulled out Beth’s suitcases and slammed the trunk. “And I’m not sure I’d want to.”

“I sense a little frustration, my sweet sister.” Beth took her smallest case from Mac and followed her up the sidewalk to the front door.

“More than a little.” Mac stood facing her door. She was sure she had her feelings under control, but it only took talking

with her sister to dredge them up again. What was she going to do? “I hate feeling like this.” Tears threatened to spill from her eyes.

“That’s why I’m here.” Beth placed a hand on her shoulder. “We’ll work through it together.”

Mac shuddered and unlocked the door. “I put you in the same room as last time.” She rolled the suitcase across the living room and down the hall.

Beth entered the room behind her. “You changed furniture and painted since I was here. I like it.”

“The paint’s new. The furniture is Jake’s. We’ve decided to live here after the wedding.” A wave of sadness hit Mac, and she leaned on the nearby desk. “If there is a wedding.”

“You’re going to get married.” Beth gripped Mac’s shoulders. “And when you do, you’ll wonder why you ever got upset.”

Mac eyed her. “Are you always going to be this positive?”

“Isn’t that why you brought me here?”

“Mama always said be careful what you ask for.”

“A wise woman, our mother.” Beth stretched. “Do you have anything to eat around here? I’m starving. And then I’d like to take a nap. Traveling is hard on us older folks.”

“Older folks.” Mac gave her sister a small push. “What are you? Forty?”

“Forty-two, if you must know.”

“Oh, well, that makes all the difference. I better get you some food right away.” Mac led the way to the kitchen, her favorite place in the house. The room was bright and welcoming with its pale green walls and off-white cabinets. “What would you like?”

“A turkey and cheese sandwich with mayo would be perfect. And iced tea if you have any.”

“I always have iced tea.”

Mac brought plates over, and the sisters settled at the two-seater table tucked in the kitchen corner.

“Thanks. This hits the spot.” Beth wiped a drip of mayo from her lip. “Sis, I’m sensing more than frustration and anxiety. What’s going on?”

“You always could read me better than anyone else.” Mac stopped mid-bite and laid her sandwich on her plate. “Something is bugging me, but every time I’m about to get a handle on it, the problem darts back into the shadows.” She ran a finger down the outside of her glass. “Something is not right about Elsie’s story, but when I mentioned it to Samantha, she said I was jealous.”

“Jealous?”

“Yeah.” Mac cut her eyes to her sister. “Elsie and her son are spending a lot of time with Samantha.” She pinched her lips together. “And Jake.”