



# DREAM OR DESTINY

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LILLIE AMMANN



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*Dream of Destiny.*

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Dream or Destiny  
by Lillie Ammann

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## **Readers are talking about *Dream or Destiny* ...**

“As David and Marilee embark on their journey to catch Barbara’s killer, you’ll find yourself comparing the clues the two discover along the way, and you’ll be so engrossed with David and Marilee’s fine detective skills that you too will be trying to solve the case with them. *Dream or Destiny* hooked me from the beginning, and I couldn’t stop reading! In fact, I had to force myself to put the book down. Lillie can truly capture a reader’s attention, and the characters she introduces her readers to are strong and realistic. This romantic suspense is not only a page-turner, it’s a great romance filled with tons of suspense!” ~ Misti Sandefur, Novelist and editor of *Coffee Break for Writers*

“An electrifying story teeming with mystery and suspense, definitely a book you want to have on your bookshelves especially if you are a fan of the genre.” ~ Mihaela Lica, Freelance writer and online public relations and media consultant

“The characters are deep and rich and I am especially enthralled with Tess. Her situation is so rare but very believable the way she is presented. I could really see her part acted out in a film version of this.” ~ Tammi Reynolds, blogger and author of *Working with Special Needs Children*

“Lillie Ammann’s unique talent brings her characters to life in this tension filled suspense, *Dream or Destiny*. From the first paragraph she’ll have your heart racing as Marilee’s nightmare takes over her life and changes it forever.” ~ Diana Lesire Brandmeyer, author of *A Time to Dance*

“Lillie Ammann has written more than a book about two people trying to solve a crime. She delves into the effects of grief and guilt, attraction and suspicion, compassion and evil.” ~ Helen Ginger, Freelance editor, book consultant, writer, and speaker

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I am grateful to my late parents for their love and the examples of their generous and hardworking lives. I appreciate the love and support of my siblings.

Above all, I give thanks to God for the many blessings I have received throughout my life. To Him be the glory.

## CHAPTER ONE

Marilee Anderson trembled, her nightgown drenched with cold sweat. Moving only her eyes, she studied her surroundings. Moonlight crept through the cracks between the curtains and created strange shadows that moved on the floor like a flow of dark blood. The plant grouping in the corner resembled a dangerous jungle. The massive armoire she loved so much loomed as a giant ready to attack. Clothes hanging in the closet became evil strangers lined up against her, and the mirror on the open door reflected something on her dresser that looked like a gun. The smells of gunpowder and blood permeated the air. Screams and groans reverberated in her head.

The drapes moved. Was it a breeze from the air conditioner? Or was someone in the room with her? Sounds of her gasping breaths and her pounding heart threatened to alert an intruder that she was in the bed and awake. Pure terror turned her spine to ice. What had woken her? Strange images superimposed themselves over the disturbing distortions of her bedroom. A figure in black stealthily creeping down a hallway, bursts of flame from the muzzle of a gun held in a gloved hand, a river of blood, and the smell of death.

She forced herself to sit up to turn on the lamp. She was safe in her own bed at home. There was no intruder, no blood, no gun, no . . .

Then she remembered.

She told herself it had been a dream, but that didn't stop the racing of her heart or the shallow gasps of her breathing. Her hands continued to tremble and another shudder ran down her spine.

How could she have dreamed such horror? She had no experience with violence. She never read crime stories, never watched horror movies. Why would she see and feel crime and horror in her sleep? Feel it she did. Terror became like a weight pushing down on the top of her head, threatening to crush her. As the blood coursed through her veins like white water rapids, she wondered if she would ever breathe normally again.

She willed herself to forget the nightmare, but fragments continued to float through her consciousness. She took a deep breath and her eyes widened as the face of the victim appeared in her mind's eye. She recognized that face, the face of Barbara Nichols, who had purchased the condominium directly above hers about six months ago.

Marilee didn't realize she had reached across the bed to turn on another lamp. Even though the room was now filled with light, she saw Barbara's face instead of the familiar surroundings of her bedroom.

Why had she dreamed about Barbara? Marilee hardly knew her. They nodded and murmured polite greetings if they happened to pass in the lobby or share an elevator, but they'd never carried on a conversation. Marilee had heard enough snippets of conversations among neighbors to realize she and Barbara were the subjects of gossip. Handsome and charming Jason Tremont had apparently transferred his affections from Marilee to Barbara.

Marilee rose from the bed and walked to the dresser. "See, Marilee, there's nothing to be afraid of," she told her reflection. She cringed, but the sound of her own voice was better than the deadly silence. "It's not a gun. It's just your new hair dryer." She picked up the hair dryer and looked at it, wondering how she could have mistaken it for a gun. She shook her head and laid the dryer back on the dresser.

She walked around the room, touching the antique armoire and the platform rocker to assure herself they were the solid pieces of furniture that belonged there. She stroked the leaves of her plants. She picked up the blanket she'd kicked off in the

throes of her nightmare and tossed it back on the queen-size waterbed.

“Okay, Marilee. You know everything’s just fine, but it won’t hurt to check the doors and windows.” The sliding glass door was locked, and the bar was in place. “Now, the rest of the house.”

Instead, she sat in the rocker, trying to make sense of her dream. Anyone hearing her speak aloud in the empty room might question her sanity, but she couldn’t stand the silence. “It doesn’t mean anything. You had too much chili for supper. Forget the darned dream. At least it’s not a ghost. Now go back to sleep.”

Her body didn’t cooperate. She sat and rocked and thought. “You haven’t had a dream that had anything to do with reality since Polly and Joe eloped.”

Her laughter sounded even less sincere to her own ears than her voice did. Her cousin Polly’s laughter had been hearty and genuine six years ago when Marilee told her she would meet the man of her dreams at the grocery store. Polly had vowed never to marry, but Joe swept her off her feet. They married three days after meeting in the grocery store the morning after Marilee’s dream.

“This is nothing like that,” she told herself sternly. “I probably thought about Barbara because I heard those people in the lobby talking about her yesterday.” The gossipers were convinced Marilee and Barbara were rivals over Jason. If only they knew how relieved Marilee had been to end their relationship.

She stood with the intention of returning to bed, then shook her head. “No way you’re going to get back to sleep now.”

As she left the bedroom, she flipped the switch for the hall light and examined the lock on the window. In the kitchen, she punched the button for the light on the vent hood as well as the overhead fluorescent. The sunny yellow walls and the shiny chrome of appliances reflected the brightness. Marilee averted her eyes from the frightening shadows created by the greenery on the baker’s rack.



Her breathing had slowed to near normal. Although her heart had decided to stay in her chest, she still felt a slight tremor in her hands. "Marilee, you're really going overboard about this dream. Yes, it was awful, but it was just a dream."

Should she call Barbara to see if she was okay? No, of course not. Hearing Barbara's voice might reassure Marilee, but a phone call in the middle of the night would probably frighten her neighbor. She might be very upset to be asked by a near-stranger if she were all right. Marilee couldn't destroy someone else's peace of mind to end her own unwarranted fear.

She stuck a cup of water in the microwave and got out a chamomile tea bag, still telling herself how silly she was acting. "Enough talking to yourself," she said as she turned on the radio. "Listen to somebody else for a while."

She tuned in to a talk show hosted by a psychologist and only half-listened while she added the tea bag and sugar and lemon to the boiling water. Gruesome images from her nightmare lingered in her mind.

The voice from the radio interrupted her thoughts. "Dr. Scarlett Murphy is taking your calls at 1-800-667-6767. She will answer your questions about anything that's troubling you."

Marilee had never called a radio talk show before, but she found herself reaching for the phone. After a short wait, she heard a bored voice ask, "What is your name?"

Briefly she toyed with the idea of giving a false name, but her innate honesty caused her to say, "Marilee." Before she could complete her name, the voice asked impatiently, "Well, Ms. Lee, what is your question for Dr. Murphy?"

Once again Marilee thought about correcting the assistant's mistake, but she didn't. Instead she briefly explained her question.

"Hmm, that's a new one. One moment, please."

After a brief wait, Marilee heard, "You're on the air. What's your question for Dr. Murphy?"

Taking a deep breath, she began again and launched herself into the midst of her own nightmare. "Do dreams

mean anything? I had an awful nightmare tonight, and I can't believe there's any ... meaning in it."

The soothing voice of the psychologist answered, "Why don't you tell me what you dreamed? Perhaps I can help you interpret the meaning."

"Well ... I seemed to witness a murder. Someone walked down a hallway holding a gun." She paused. "It went into the bedroom and shot once into the wall. Then when the woman woke up, it shot her five times." Marilee's voice quivered as she finished the story.

"Did you recognize the killer and the victim?"

"Not the killer. I couldn't even tell if it was male or female." A deep breath. "The victim was my neighbor who lives above me."

"It appears you hold unresolved hostility toward this neighbor. How has he hurt you?"

Marilee shook her head, then realized she had to respond verbally. "It's a she, and she hasn't hurt me. I barely even know her, just enough to say hi in the hall."

Dr. Murphy made soothing noises before her next comment. "Dreaming of a murder reveals a deep-seated rage against the person you murder in your dream."

"I didn't murder anyone. In my dream, I watched someone else commit a murder." Marilee barely managed to control her voice.

"You recognized the victim, but you didn't see the murderer. If you had been a witness, you would have seen the killer as well as the victim."

Marilee started to speak into the pause, but the psychologist continued, "Obviously, you are the person with the gun. You are repressing your deep hostility toward this woman in your daily life, but it's too strong to stay hidden. It comes out in your dreams."

Marilee could no longer keep her voice from rising. "I don't have any rage or hostility, deep-seated or otherwise, toward this woman. How could I have any strong feelings toward her? I don't even know her. And nothing comes out

in dreams, plural. This is the one and only dream I've ever had about her."

The psychologist answered, "The subconscious is very powerful. Your conscious can control your antisocial urges, but your subconscious knows your real feelings."

Marilee rolled her eyes and shook her head. "That's ridiculous!" She dropped the receiver back into the cradle and turned the radio dial to an easy listening music station. Whatever had possessed her to call into a weird talk show, anyway?

*Real* experts didn't haunt the airways in the wee hours of the morning. Sensationalism upped ratings. Of course, the pop psychologist would have to come up with some melodramatic theory. Who would tune in to listen to someone who said dreams don't mean anything?

Wouldn't the old biddies who were already gossiping about Barbara and Jason and Marilee love to hear about her dream? They'd really have something to talk about then. Some already pitied her for not being able to hold on to her man.

For a time, she'd thought Jason was her man. She'd felt a thrill that by the third or fourth time he'd brought her home, he knew several of the tenants by name. He asked about the security guard's arthritis, admired pictures of the Smiths' grandchildren, talked mutual funds with the stockbroker on the fourth floor, and held the elevator door for anyone crossing the lobby. Jason always had a good story, a laugh, and a smile for everyone he met.

Marilee knew people had wondered what Jason had seen in her. While he chatted with complete strangers, her best effort produced only a smile and a nod. She hardly knew her neighbors, even though she'd lived in the same place for several years. She had no problem teaching or speaking in a professional setting. In a social environment, however, she could hear the pitch of her voice rise and the speed increase so she sounded as if she were racing, even to herself.

She'd been flattered to be singled out by the popular Jason Tremont. She'd thought he would help her come out

of her shell, but it didn't take long for her to see a side of Jason most people never knew.

"Quit this, Marilee!" She looked at the clock on the wall. "It's after four in the morning. You've been up for nearly two hours. Back to bed. You had a bad dream, that's all. The dream wasn't even about you, so why are you so terrified?"

Voicing her fear still didn't make it disappear. Marilee felt a cold chill pass through her body.

As she went through the house turning off lights, she couldn't resist checking the security of each door and window once more. She couldn't convince herself to turn off the hall light. Foreboding hung over her like a cloud, and she lay in bed praying to forget her dream for a long time before finally falling asleep.

When she woke the next morning, the feeling of dread still hovered around her. She looked at the clock. She'd either forgotten to set her alarm or turned it off during the night. She'd have to hurry or she'd be late to church. Maybe an hour in church would help restore her peace of mind. She still felt weighted down by fear and dread. Seeing police cars outside her building didn't relieve her.

The congregation taking their seats at the end of a hymn covered Marilee's late arrival. She hurried down the side aisle and slipped into a pew.

The minister stood in front of the altar before the intercessory prayer. "We ask your prayers for David Nichols, who is a member of our congregation, and for the soul of his sister, Barbara Nichols. David found her body this morning. She had been shot to death." The minister bowed his head and began to pray.

Marilee sat stiffly in her seat staring straight ahead. Instead of the words of the prayer, she heard the sound of gunshots. Instead of a church filled with praying congregants, she saw blood spurting from bullet holes in Barbara Nichols' chest. Instead of the perfume of her pew-mate, she smelled gunpowder and blood. Instead of the peace and serenity she usually felt in church, she felt icy fingers of anxiety and terror clawing at her throat.

She didn't realize when the prayer ended. She wasn't even aware the lady next to her was trying to pass her the offering plate. The usher took the plate and gave Marilee a questioning look. She answered with a smile that seemed to convince him she was all right.

Marilee couldn't concentrate on the sermon. She spent the time debating with her conscience. Since Barbara really had been murdered, shouldn't she tell the police about her dream? Maybe something she could tell them would help solve the crime. Then she shook her head. That was ridiculous. Stupid. Absurd! She'd had a dream, a nightmare. She didn't know anything that would help the police.

If she contacted them, she'd probably just muddy the waters. They'd spend time checking out her dream instead of looking for the killer. She'd lose time from her business, and, much worse, she'd be exposed to public scrutiny. She'd become known as the crazy lady who dreamed a murder. She'd be different, again. She'd be laughed at, again. Marilee had spent her entire adult life struggling to be like everyone else.

Even if she'd had a precognitive dream, what good would it do to tell the police after the fact? She couldn't prevent the murder. It was too late for that. She couldn't identify the killer. All she'd seen was a black draped figure with a gun. There was absolutely no way the dream could help solve the crime.

Marilee slipped out before the end of the service to avoid having to speak to anyone. She got in her car and drove down Wurzbach. When she reached Interstate 10, she turned west instead of east toward her home. There was little traffic this Sunday morning, and Marilee soon was outside the city and speeding along the highway.

She tried to forget her dilemma and focus on the blue sky and colorful wildflowers growing beside the road. She turned on the radio to search for a music station.

After a commercial, she heard, "Police are looking for a woman who called into *The Midnight Hour* on this station last night." She stopped changing the dial and listened. "The

call, about a dream of murder, occurred shortly after the estimated time of death of Barbara Nichols, who was viciously murdered at the Oakview Condominiums. Police ask anyone who has any information about this murder or the talk show caller to contact Detective Arturo Garcia at the San Antonio Police Department, Homicide Division. Detective Garcia has refused to say whether the mystery caller is a suspect. He told this reporter, "We believe the woman has valuable information, and we need to interview her immediately."

"What the . . .?" Marilee exclaimed aloud. Her grip tightened on the steering wheel, and the pressure she'd felt since she woke from her dream pressed heavier on her head. She swerved into the right lane, exited at Boerne Stage Road, and pulled into the parking lot of a restaurant just past the exit. Another news story blared from the radio, but Marilee didn't turn it off until the newscast ended.

Why were the police looking for her? Her dream couldn't possibly have anything to do with Barbara's death. It was a bizarre coincidence. That's all it could be. She'd known that psychologist was a quack last night when the esteemed doctor had pronounced Marilee harbored rage toward Barbara. Rage ... murder ... no one could believe she had anything to do with this terrible tragedy. The newscast had used the word suspect. She couldn't be a suspect, could she?

Marilee didn't know how long she sat there debating with herself. The sounds of gunshots mingled in her mind with the taunts she'd endured throughout her childhood. Freak. Witch. Weirdo. Crazy, crazy Marilee, dreams the future for you and me.

No, no, no! She wouldn't go through that agony again. Surely if she cooperated with the police they would respect her privacy and keep her identity secret. Once they heard her story, she wouldn't be a suspect. Then she could go back to her quiet, ordered, private life.

She squared her shoulders. No sense in putting off the inevitable. If the police were looking for her, she'd contact them right away and get this over with.

When she drove into the parking garage at her condominium complex, she shook her head, trying to remember the return trip. Her dream felt more real to her than this morning's events.

She went straight to the kitchen phone. Grabbing the phone book, she found the number and dialed. "San Antonio Police Department. How may I direct your call?"

"I need to speak ... Homicide Department, please."

After a short delay, she heard "Homicide. Johnston."

"Detective . . ." Her voice trailed off as she realized she didn't recall the detective's name. "Uh, I don't know the name, but I need to speak to the officer handling the Barbara Nichols murder case."

"That's Garcia. Hang on."

After a brief pause, a different voice said, "Garcia here."

"Officer Garcia—"

"It's Detective Garcia."

"Oh, of course, Detective Garcia." Marilee identified herself and breathed deeply. "I'm the one who called the radio station last night about a dream I had."

The detective obtained Marilee's address and phone number. "Are you at home now?"

When she answered in the affirmative, he continued, "I'm sending a patrol car to pick you up. I need to talk to you immediately."

"I'm at home, but you don't have to send a car. I can drive myself." Marilee wanted to be able to come and go on her own.

A muffled conversation took place on the other end of the line, then Detective Garcia spoke into the phone. "The car's on the way. I'll see you in my office soon." He hung up the phone before Marilee could protest.

Twenty-five minutes later, she walked to the patrol car with the young police officer. Even though she didn't see anyone, she imagined she could feel her neighbors' eyes boring into her. She just knew everyone had to be watching as a uniformed officer escorted her to the police car. It was her worst nightmare come true.



She grimaced and felt a stab of guilt. No, it wasn't her worst nightmare. Her worst nightmare had come true last night. What happened to her neighbor was a million times worse than being the center of negative attention. Marilee may have always imagined nothing could be worse than being the object of ridicule and speculation, but now she'd seen much worse.

Her internal lecture didn't eliminate her self-consciousness or shame, but she did convince herself she had to take this step. Her own fragile emotions were insignificant compared to the death of another human being.

The policeman gave up his attempts at small talk when Marilee ignored him or answered only in monosyllables. Finally they arrived at the police station, and the patrolman escorted her through a maze of hallways into an office containing four battered wooden desks. Only one of the desks was occupied.

"Here she is, sir." The young officer hurried away after his introduction, if that's what it was meant to be.

"Ms. Anderson, have a seat. I need to ask you some questions." The heavily masculine voice matched the large, muscular man who pointed to a chair "How long have you lived in the Oakview Condominiums?"

Although question followed question with the speed of the bullets Marilee had seen in her dream, she found it easy to answer such questions as "Where do you work?"

"I'm self-employed as a business consultant."

She'd begun to relax until the detective asked, "What was your relationship with the deceased?"

"We didn't have a relationship." Marilee concentrated on keeping her voice even. "She moved into the apartment above me about six months ago. We introduced ourselves in the lobby, and we say ... uh ... I mean, we said hello when we passed in the hall. That's all."

She felt every muscle in her body tense at the detective's next question. "Okay, tell me about this so-called dream."



"It wasn't a so-called dream. It was a nightmare." She shivered at the memory. "The first thing I saw was a figure in black—"

"Could you identify this figure?"

"No, I only saw it from the neck down."

"You're saying it. Could you tell if it was male or female?"

Detective Garcia made marks on a paper on his desk. Marilee couldn't tell if he was taking notes or doodling.

"No. It was wearing some kind of black cape-like thing."

She closed her eyes and concentrated on recalling the details. "It held a gun out in front with both hands."

"Describe the hands," the detective said. He stroked his chin as he looked at the paper on his desk.

"Everything was black, the long sleeves, the—"

Detective Garcia looked up. "Sleeves? I thought you said it was cape-like."

"It did look like a cape. I'm not sure it had sleeves, but the arms were covered. Everything was black, the cape-like thing, the gun, the hands." She felt her forehead crease as she concentrated. "But it wasn't black skin I saw. It was too smooth, too even. It must have been gloves."

"Okay. Black cape, black gloves, black gun." Detective Garcia definitely made a note, not a doodle. "What else can you tell me about the gun?"

"I don't know anything about guns. It was about the same length as the hands." She wrinkled her forehead as she tried to describe what she'd seen. "That's all I know. It was black and looked big to me."

"Okay. Where was this figure in black and what was it doing?"

"It was walking down a hallway. It was only a few steps from the end when my dream started, but it seemed to take forever to take those last few steps. It took one step, then waited like maybe ... listening for something, then it took another step." Marilee rolled her shoulders in an attempt to release some of the tension. She didn't feel any noticeable results.

"Then what?" Detective Garcia seemed oblivious to her discomfort. What was a unique and terrifying experience to her was probably routine to him.

"When it got to the end of the hallway, it stood there for a second or so. Then it walked into the bedroom and—"

"Was the door open or closed?"

"Open. The figure walked in and stood at the foot of the bed." A shudder passed through Marilee's body. "Barbara was lying there on her back."

The detective stroked his chin. "You recognized her?"

Marilee played the dream over in her mind like a video. "No, not then. I just saw a woman. I didn't see her face until she sat up after the first shot."

"Okay, back to your story. You saw a woman lying on the bed. Then what?" Detective Garcia made some marks that looked more like doodles than notes. Was the man taking notes or doodling?

"I could see her chest move up and down. Her breathing seemed so loud." The video in Marilee's mind played its sounds effects. The crack of a shot covered the sound of breathing. "This next part is crazy."

The detective nodded. "Go ahead."

"The black figure aimed the gun above the bed and shot into the wall. Why would he do that?" Deep down, she knew the answer to her own question. The killer obviously had wanted Barbara to wake up and realize she was going to die.

Detective Garcia ignored her question. "What happened after the shot into the wall?"

"Barbara bolted up in the bed. That's when I saw her face. I recognized her, and," Marilee shivered, "it looked like she recognized the person at the foot of the bed. She started to say something, but all that came out was something like 'What?'"

"Did she just stop talking or did something happen to stop her?"

Marilee considered. "It sounded like she was starting to ask a question, maybe something like 'what's going on?' But the next shot stopped her from saying anything else."

"Was the next shot also into the wall?"

"Oh, no." Marilee wanted to cry and wondered if her voice revealed her emotions. "No, the second shot hit her right in the chest. So much blood. And the shots just kept coming. And the blood just kept spurting."

"How many shots in all?"

Marilee counted the shots in her mental video. "Five shots into Barbara, plus the one that went into the wall. And all the shots were in her chest. She looked like ..."

"Like what?"

Marilee recoiled as if she herself had been shot. "Like ... like ... like a sieve draining blood instead of water."

Detective Garcia continued to ask questions. "Okay, what happened next?"

"Barbara just slumped forward and didn't move."

"What happened then?" The detective leaned back in his chair, lifting the front legs off the floor so far Marilee was afraid the chair would fall over.

"Nothing. That was the end of the dream. I woke up, and I ... I felt this terrible fear. I didn't remember the dream, and I thought I was in danger. Silly, huh?" Marilee tried to laugh at her fears, but the laughter sounded obscene in the midst of her morbid recollections.

The investigator ignored her laugh, as he'd ignored everything else about her except her words. "When did you remember the dream?"

"It came back right after I woke up. It took a little longer for me to remember who I dreamed about, though."

Detective Garcia brought his chair upright again. "Why do you think you had this dream?"

"I don't know. It was just a dream. People have dreams all the time." Marilee heard her voice rise, but she couldn't seem to control it. "I don't understand this."

"Ms. Anderson, I don't understand this either. A brutal murder was committed just over your head last night. Shortly after the murder, you called a radio talk show and described a dream that sounds like the actual crime. The victim was killed by five shots to the chest fired at close range. There was a sixth bullet in the wall. That's what you say you dreamed. Now, I'm just a simple cop, but something don't sound right about that to me." Garcia's dark eyes pierced her defenses and destroyed her composure.

Her shoulders shook, and she blinked against the threatening tears. "This all has to be some weird coincidence. I didn't know she was really killed, for heaven's sake. It was a dream. That's all it was." She clasped her hands together to stop the trembling.

Detective Garcia continued to question her. She'd never understood the term "the third degree" before, but now she felt like she'd been through the fourth or fifth degree at least. She lost count of how many times she recounted her dream, elaborating on seemingly minute details.

"You said the room was dark. How can you describe the scene if it was dark?" the detective asked without looking up from his doodling or note taking.

"I keep telling you it was a dream. A dream doesn't have to make sense. You don't have to have light to see in a dream. It was all in my head or wherever dreams are." She rolled her head backwards and stared at the ceiling briefly. When the stains on the plaster reminded her of blood, she closed her eyes. The terrible video continued in her mind.

"There was moonlight coming in from the windows." A pause as she visualized the scene. "And night lights. There were night lights in the hall and in the bedroom."

"What kind of night lights?"

"I don't know what kind of night lights. You know, those little lights you stick into an electrical plug. Not very big, just enough to see your way to the bathroom or something. What difference does it make what kind of night light?" If this didn't

end soon, she'd disintegrate. This guy should be out looking for the killer, not wasting her time and his asking her endless questions about the tiny details of her dream.

"Did you ever see any other light?"

"Well, I saw a huge flash from the gun with each shot. Wait a minute, I just remembered. There was a little dot of red light reflecting in front of the black figure."

The detective stopped doodling and looked up. "Reflecting where?"

She closed her eyes and rolled her head backwards. "Well, I saw it on the wall in the hall. Then I saw the red dot ..."

"Go on."

"The dot reflected on the bedroom wall at first and then on ... on Barbara's chest." The memory caused her to shiver.

"Did it look like a beam from a laser sight?"

"What's that?" Marilee asked.

For the first time in the interrogation, Detective Garcia answered her question. "A narrow laser beam that reflects the point of impact where the gun is aimed."

"Does it look like a little dot of red light?"

Garcia nodded. "Yeah."

"That's what I saw, a little red dot. So maybe it was that laser thing."

"Okay. Describe the gun again."

She tried to describe the weapon, but how does someone who doesn't know anything about guns describe one other than black and menacing?

"What size was it?" Detective Garcia leaned back in his chair again.

"I thought it was big, about the size of the hands holding it." She gritted her teeth and breathed deeply. "I don't know if that's big by gun standards. I don't know anything about guns. All I know is it looked huge to me."

When Marilee thought the torture would last forever, the detective said, "Okay, that's it for now. You need to come back in the morning and sign the statement after it's been transcribed."

"Tomorrow morning isn't convenient. I have several appointments scheduled." Marilee stood and picked up her purse from the floor. "Can I come in after lunch?"

"Ms. Anderson, it wasn't convenient for Ms. Nichols to get herself killed either. We need to move this investigation forward. Be here tomorrow morning before ten o'clock."

Marilee cringed. He made it sound like she was uncaring that a woman had been killed. "I certainly want to see the investigation go forward. I just don't understand how my statement can be of any importance."

He reached for the phone. "I'm calling a patrol officer to drive you home. Do I need to arrange for someone to pick you up in the morning?"

She shook her head. "No, I'll be here before ten."

Her police escort soon arrived and led her out of the cramped office. As they walked down the hall, someone called her name.

The young man who had spoken her name stepped in front of them. He would have been extremely attractive if he hadn't looked hung over. His mussed black hair fell across his forehead but didn't quite hide the scar over his right eyebrow. His face was far too pale for his dark hair and eyes. Although of good quality, his clothes appeared neglected. His rumpled suit looked like he'd slept in it, and his tie hung askew.

Marilee glanced at the patrolman, expecting him to dismiss the derelict. Instead, he asked, "Mr. Nichols, are you all right, sir?"

The man ignored the officer and took a step closer to Marilee. "Ms. Anderson, I'm David Nichols, Barbara's brother. Can I speak with you?"

Barbara's brother. No wonder he looked like a derelict. "Mr. Nichols, I'm so sorry about Barbara."

"Thanks. Look, I really need to talk to you. About your dream."

"Mr. Nichols, I don't know what I can tell you. I've been answering questions for," she looked at her watch, "my word, it's been over three hours now. I—"

“Please.” He reached out but stopped short of touching her. “It’s important.”

Another police officer approached. “There’s a bunch of reporters waiting on the front steps. You guys want to talk to them?”

Reporters! Oh, no. Marilee felt herself sway slightly. Someone took her arm to support her. The voices around her seemed to come from a great distance.

“Is there a back way out of here?”

“Follow me.”

## CHAPTER TWO

Marilee felt two men hustling her down the hall and into a police car. The trip home blurred as memories of her dream continued to disturb her. After the policeman escorted her to her front door, she went into the living room and dropped onto the sofa. She had no idea how much time had passed before the doorbell brought her out of her daze. She opened the door as far as the safety chain allowed.

She gasped. "Mr. Nichols—"

"I need your help." The way he said it made her suspect he didn't admit that very often.

"I had a dream. That's it. There's nothing I can tell you." Peering through the crack, she looked around the hall. Even though she saw no one, she expected doors to open any minute and curious faces to appear.

"Just tell me about your dream—please."

"I don't want to have this conversation in the hall." She closed the door and removed the chain. "Come inside," she said as she opened the door.

"Look, I know you've been through hell already. But so have I. My sister's been brutally murdered. For pity's sake, can't you help me?"

"I don't see how I can help," she said. Seeing how lost and desperate he looked, she added, "but I'll try."

He nodded and the tension in his jaw eased slightly.

"I'm ordering a pizza," she told him. "I'll order a large one if you want some."

Soon, they were seated at Marilee's kitchen table sharing the pizza.



"Guess it's a good idea you suggested food," David said. "I haven't eaten since last night. I was going to have breakfast with Barbara." He laid the slice of pizza on his plate, stood, and turned away from Marilee.

She saw his shoulders shake and heard the muffled sobs. She hated exposing her own emotions and vulnerabilities, so she respected another person's desire for privacy. Yet she found herself rising and stepping toward David. She'd reached out and touched his forearm before she realized what she was doing.

He jumped, and she drew her hand back. "I'm sorry," Marilee said. "I didn't mean to intrude. I just wanted to ..." Wanted to what? Offer comfort? Reach out to a man whose weakness seemed out of character, even on a first meeting?

He squared his shoulders and wiped away the tears. "Sorry I fell apart. You see, I found Barbara's body when I went for breakfast."

Marilee sat down again and picked up a slice of pizza. She took a bite. It tasted like cardboard, and she put the rest back on her plate. She couldn't eat while she recalled that mental video playing behind her eyes. It must be much harder for David, who had actually found his sister's body.

She was surprised when he continued his gory tale. "She didn't answer the doorbell, and I couldn't find my key. I was going to knock on the door, but when I touched it, it swung open." He turned back to face Marilee and shook his head. "I got worried then. Barbara's been so careful since she moved here."

Marilee nodded because she didn't know what to say.

"You see," David continued, "she came here to hide out from her no-good husband, ex-husband now. How did that so-and-so find out where she was?"

"You think her ex-husband killed her?"

"It had to be him. He'd told her over and over again he'd kill her if she ever left him. It took every ounce of courage she had to run away and come here." He sat back down at the table.

"They're divorced now?" Marilee cringed when she realized Barbara's life was as past tense as her marital status.

David didn't seem to notice her slip. "She divorced him after she left California. She thought she'd escaped him. He didn't know where she was." He shook his head. "Well, I guess he finally found out."

Marilee remained silent.

"It's just not right. She put up with that scum for six years before she finally got up the courage to leave. After our childhood, I never understood how she could have gotten herself in that situation anyway."

"What about your childhood?" Marilee asked.

David pushed the plate away and leaned forward. "I don't talk about my childhood. We came here to discuss your dream."

"Are you sure you want to hear this? It's pretty gruesome."

David slapped the table. "Gruesome. Gruesome is going to have breakfast with your sister and finding her body riddled with bullets and blood everywhere. How can a dream compare with that?"

"Because that's what the dream was. I saw her bullet-ridden body. I saw rivers of blood. I also saw the bullets plowing into her body. I saw the blood spurt out of those holes. I saw the whole thing happen." Marilee dropped her head into her hands. "I can't tell you. You don't want to hear it."

"Oh yes, I want to hear it. I want to know every detail," David insisted. "I've got to find something that will point to Gerald Welty. He's finally going to pay for what he's done. Tell me every little detail of your dream."

He looked like a haggard derelict, and he hid his tears, but she heard the emotion in his voice. Color returned to his face, and his whole body seemed to strengthen.

"Okay," Marilee agreed. She recounted the dream sequence. After telling and re-telling it at the police station, she could recite the events of the dream without flinching. She tried to downplay the horror, but she had to tell him the killer woke Barbara before shooting her.

"That no-good so-and-so. He was determined for her to know it was him. He wanted to be sure she knew he'd finally carried out his threat." David stood to pace from the table to the door and back again and again.

Marilee stopped herself from approaching him. She realized he wouldn't appreciate her comfort. "I'm sure the police will catch the killer."

"I'm not at all sure of that. They asked me if I knew anyone who might do this, but they didn't seem to take me seriously when I told them I knew who did it. That detective asked me how I could know who did it if I wasn't there." He stopped pacing to face her. "I was hoping you could describe the killer."

Marilee shook her head. "I'm sorry. I never saw the killer's face. I couldn't even tell if it was a man or a woman."

"Oh, it was a man, all right, in the loosest definition of the word." David spoke through clenched teeth. "Certainly not a man by my definition. No man beats up on a woman and calls himself a man in my book."

Marilee sat down and started to collect wrappings from the pizza. Most of his still lay on the plate. "David, you should eat something."

He whirled around, his face a picture of rage. "Barbara came here to be safe, so I could protect her. That pond scum got to her anyway." He picked his plate and threw it across the room. "I'm supposed to eat like nothing's happened? She'll never eat again, and it's all my fault."

Marilee felt an almost overwhelming need to connect with him, to comfort him. She wondered if he even knew she sat across the table from him. She could understand only part of what he mumbled; he seemed to be talking to himself. "You promised ... safe ... failed ... scum of the earth ... your own fault ... terrified ... worthless no-good ... he'll pay for ..."

He slumped into the chair and yielded to his emotions. Tears streamed down his face and sobs racked his body. He seemed lost in a combination of grief, rage, guilt, and despair.

Marilee found herself confused by this man. She couldn't help being touched by someone who showed his deepest emotions so profoundly. But could that rage have led him to murder his sister? Should she be afraid?

Finally, he seemed to pull himself together physically. He sat straighter in the chair, wiped his face with a paper napkin, and looked at Marilee. "Tell me your dream one more time."

"You're torturing yourself. I told you everything the first time." She could resist the temptation no longer. She walked around the table. As she placed her hand on his shoulder, she asked, "Why don't you tell me about Barbara? I didn't really know her."

After he pulled away from her touch, she returned to the other side of the table. David decided to go along with her attempt to distract him. His gut told him this woman could help him bring Barbara's killer to justice. While he wanted to press her for more details, he realized she'd be more cooperative if he didn't push so hard. Maybe she was right. Maybe he needed to remember Barbara in life and try to forget, at least for a minute, the horror of her death.

"She was nearly six years younger than me, and she always looked up to her big brother." He felt some of the tension leave his body as he remembered the little pig-tailed girl who'd followed him everywhere. "Mom, uh, wasn't very strong, so I had a lot of responsibility for Barbara from the time she was about a year old."

"Didn't a seven or eight year old boy resent taking care of a baby girl? Didn't you want to be out playing with your friends?"

"Friends? I didn't have any friends." How had that slipped out? He had to watch what he said. He was too vulnerable now. "Uh, sure, I wanted to be out with my friends. But Barbara needed me."

"I'm surprised a young boy knew or cared that a baby needed him." Marilee's forehead was creased in a quizzical frown.

He'd said the wrong thing again. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. He couldn't talk about Barbara without giving away too many secrets. "Well, that was a long time ago. It's not important now. All that matters now is nailing that scum of the earth for killing her."

"Are you sure her ex-husband killed her?"

The hiss of the coffeemaker punctuated her question. He hadn't even noticed her filling the pot or setting it to brew.

"Of course, I'm sure. I don't know how many times he threatened to kill her, but it was often." He hoped his voice didn't reveal the hurt he'd felt when he learned Barbara hadn't contacted him the first time her husband took a swing at her.

As he took the cup of coffee she offered, he saw compassion in Marilee's hazel eyes. At least he hoped it was compassion and not pity. He couldn't stand being pitied.

She stirred sugar into her own coffee. "I really do want to help you, but I don't know what I can do. I've repeated my dream dozens of times, and I've tried to remember every detail. There was nothing there to identify the killer."

David struggled to keep the impatience out of his voice. "I know you believe that. But maybe something ... I don't know, a mannerism, the walk, something ... points to Welty. Maybe nobody would recognize it but me."

"Okay, here goes." She repeated the dream sequence again in as much detail as she had given Detective Garcia.

"Nothing unusual in the way he walked? The way he held the gun?" David knew he sounded desperate, but he couldn't help it.

"The only thing about the way it walked," he noticed she insisted on calling the triggerman 'it,' "was that it waited between steps, like maybe it was listening for a sound." Marilee shook her head. "That was probably what it was doing, listening to see if anyone heard it."

David sighed. "Yeah, you're probably right. What about the gun?"

"I don't know anything about guns. I've never been around them. But I saw a red dot in front of the gun that

Detective Garcia said was a laser." She let out a deep breath. "I wish I could help you. I really do, but I don't think I can."

"Thanks for trying, anyway." He walked around the table and picked up the smashed pizza and the paper plate from the floor. He dampened a paper towel at the sink, wiped up the mess, and hoped his actions served as an apology.

"Have you made the funeral arrangements yet?" Marilee's soft voice contrasted with the question, which pierced him with sharp pain.

"I contacted a funeral home this morning." He grimaced. "I have an appointment with them tomorrow. The service will probably be Wednesday."

Marilee stepped closer. When she raised her hand as if to touch him, he stepped back. He didn't want comfort. He needed to hurt; he deserved to feel pain. He'd promised to protect Barbara, and he'd failed. Guilt gnawed his insides and hardened his resolve. Barbara's killer would pay. For a moment, he felt a primitive urge to exact an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life.

Some small sound, a sigh, perhaps, alerted him that Marilee stood a few feet from him. He'd forgotten she was there. He hadn't even thought of her as a person, merely as a source of information about his sister's murder. Now as he looked at her, he saw a woman about Barbara's age. Her slender but curvy shape and smooth complexion would have attracted him under other circumstances. What caught his attention now, however, was the haunted look in her hazel eyes and the slight tremor in her hands. She looked grief-stricken or frightened or both.

He rubbed his forehead in an effort to wipe away the dull ache. "Look, I'm sorry. You've tried to help, and I appreciate it. I won't bother you anymore." He started toward the living room.

Marilee followed him. "Don't worry about bothering me. I really would like to help. I didn't know Barbara very well, but I feel ... oh, I don't know ... connected with her somehow."

"Look, I appreciate your cooperation. If you think of anything else that might be helpful, give me a call." He pulled a business card and a pen out of his pocket, leaned over the hall table, and wrote something on the back. He handed her the card and pointed to the writing. "This is my home phone number. My office phone, pager, and cellular numbers are on the card. Call me anytime."

She took the card and laid it on the table. "Wait a minute and let me give you my number. My office is here in the house so there's only one main number plus my cell phone. If you think of any specific questions to ask about my dream, I'll ... well, just call me."

Her heels clicked on the Saltillo tile floor. He watched her enter the door opposite the living room. She returned and handed him the promised card. "Thanks again," he said. "I don't intend to bother you again, but I appreciate the offer."

After he left, Marilee secured the door and returned to the kitchen. She'd planned to finish cleaning up the debris from the pizza, but her strength had deserted her. She felt limp and exhausted. The stresses of the past night and day had combined to drain her physically and emotionally. She collapsed into a chair and dropped her head onto her crossed arms. She must have dozed, but she jerked upright when she heard screams. The smell of blood and gunpowder filled the air.

It took her a few seconds to become oriented and realize the screams and smells took place in her head, not in the real world. Not again! She couldn't endure a repeat of this nightmare. Her dreams never recurred. Had she retold this so many times it was haunting her?

Resolutely, she determined to forget the dream, the murder, the investigation, and everything associated with Barbara Nichols. None of this, tragic as it was, had anything to do with her. She wrapped her arms around her midsection, but she couldn't stop the shudders that coursed through her body.



"Okay, Marilee," she told herself aloud, "you're going to forget dreams and murder. You need to get ready for your appointments with your clients tomorrow." The recollection that she would be meeting with Detective Garcia instead of her clients caused her to unwrap her arms and clench her fists. "Go ahead and get ready anyway so you can reschedule the appointments as soon as possible."

As hard as she tried to immerse herself in the mundane business problems of her clients, she couldn't forget the blasted dream or its aftermath. She reviewed reports, made notes, and adjusted projections in the computer, but a sense of foreboding continued to hover over her. Why couldn't she lose this dread, this terror, this sense of impending doom? The worst had already happened. Her nightmare had come true. An innocent woman was dead ... Barbara Nichols must have been an innocent woman. The depth of emotion her brother had shown at her death indicated that she'd been someone special. Anyway, regardless of what kind of person she'd been, no one deserved to die the way Barbara had.

After an hour or so, Marilee finally gave up. She wasn't making any progress. She couldn't even recall her client's name or his consulting goal. She'd better just admit her lack of concentration before she made a serious mistake.

Later, she managed to finish cleaning the kitchen. As if to rid herself of the memories of her nightmare, she found herself changing the linens on the bed. Then, she threw the gown and robe she'd worn last night into the hamper. A shower couldn't wash away the horror. Fresh sheets and a new gown and robe couldn't replace the fear. She checked and re-checked locks while she tried to relax with a book. She'd deliberately chosen a light romantic comedy, but the humor and romance didn't ease her apprehension. A sleeping pill did nothing to relax her.

At eleven-thirty, she spoke to the empty room. "Marilee, time for bed. Everything's secure. You've checked a dozen times. Goodnight."



She shook her head when she realized she was about to answer herself. Less than twenty-four hours after she woke from that gory vision, she was doing what was commonly considered the height of insanity, not only talking aloud to herself, but answering herself as well.

She tried to chuckle at her own eccentricity, but she couldn't. The sound came out a weak squeal. Although she forced herself to remain silent, she carried on a conversation in her head. When she reached the bedroom, however, she found she couldn't convince herself to sleep in that bed. She returned to the living room to stretch out on the sofa.

That night lasted longer than any other night of her life, except the previous one. In spite of the sleeping pill and a glass of warm milk, she slept sporadically and lightly. She tried to pray but all she could seem to say was, "Why, Lord?" Anxiety and disquiet seemed to anchor her to the sofa, where she couldn't escape the sights, sounds, and smells of her nightmare.

When morning finally arrived, Marilee dragged herself from the sofa. Despite knowing nothing could lift the heavy load of fear and anguish from her shoulders, she tried to relax in a long soaking bath. When she opened her closet door to select clothing appropriate for a trip to the police station, she realized she'd worn black yesterday. She'd dressed in the funereal suit even before she learned about the murder. Maybe her subconscious recognized the reality of her dream, even when her conscious denied it.

Today she chose a navy blue suit with a slim skirt and boxy jacket. Usually she softened the severity of the outfit with a colorful blouse, but today she wore a pale blue shirt with no accessories or color accents.

As the grandfather clock in the hallway chimed eight o'clock, she stepped into her office to call the clients scheduled for today. Since she didn't know how long it would take at the police station, she decided to cancel all her appointments. "A conflict has developed, and I need to reschedule our appointment." Although she'd planned to set another

appointment, she heard herself saying, "Perhaps it would be better if I called you later in the week to reschedule."

After the first two clients agreed, she thought she'd avoid any problems or controversy. Then on the third call, her client asked, "Is it true you're involved in a murder?"

"I'm not involved in a murder," she answered through clenched teeth. "The police thought I might have useful information, but after I gave a statement, I'm sure they realize I can't help them."

"But you're a suspect, aren't you?" her client continued.

"Of course, I'm not a suspect." Dear heaven, she wasn't, was she? Of course not. "I'll call you toward the end of the week to reschedule. Thank you for understanding about today's cancellation." She hung up before the person at the end of the line could respond. Suspect, indeed. What a ludicrous idea!

A short while later, it didn't seem so ludicrous. She'd realized her name would probably appear in the newspaper, but she was shocked when she saw the headlines. The news on the radio even mentioned her by name. Tragically, murders had become common enough that she hadn't expected the amount of sensational coverage this one was receiving from the media. She turned off the radio and tossed the paper into the trash.

"Might as well get this over with." Good grief, she had to stop talking to herself. People really would think she was crazy.

She released a small sigh of relief when she found the elevator empty. It didn't stop between the fifth floor and the first floor lobby. She'd chosen her departure time carefully to avoid encountering any of her neighbors. The only person in sight was the security guard at the front desk.

She'd selected this building at least partly because of the security system. There was a guard on duty the entire time the front door was unlocked. At ten p.m., the guard went off duty and access required a key.

How then had Barbara's killer entered the building? She was killed around two a.m., so the killer had to have a key

or have been hiding in the building for several hours. There just weren't that many hiding places. Besides, visitors had to sign in. The guard's log would show anyone who signed in without signing out.

She approached the guard desk. "Sid, do you know who was on duty night before last?"

The bulky man shifted in his seat. "I was, Miz Anderson. I worked evening shift over the weekend. Just started back on days a few hours ago." He half-rose from his seat and pointed to the logbook. "The cops have already been here and picked up my records."

"Oh." Of course the police would have checked out the security precautions in the building.

Sid sat back down and shook his head. "Sure is a shame about Miz Nichols. She was a right nice lady, wasn't she?"

"I didn't really know her very well, but what happened to her is a terrible tragedy."

"Heard you dreamed the whole thing. Musta been pretty weird."

Marilee felt a shudder run down her back. "Sorry I don't have time to chat, Sid. I have to hurry or I'll be late for my appointment." She walked away before the guard could respond.

She thought she'd avoided rush hour, but traffic on IH10 crept along. By the time she found a parking place downtown, her palms were moist. She took a deep breath and walked a couple of blocks to the police station.

When she gave her name to the bored-looking officer at the desk, he said, "Detective Garcia's waiting for you. You know where his office is?"

Marilee nodded and started down the hall. *Garcia's waiting? For me? He should be out looking for the killer instead of waiting for me to sign a piece of paper. If Barbara's ex-husband killed her, he'd be long gone back to California.*

Garcia acknowledged her with a nod. He motioned for her to sit and handed her several typed pages.

"Have you remembered anything else?" he asked.

"No." She shook her head and started to read the statement. For several minutes, the only sounds were the crinkling of paper as she turned the pages and the scratching of Garcia's pen as he doodled on a desk pad. "This is fine. Where do I sign it?"

The doodling stopped. "Are you sure you can't remember anything else? Juries find it suspicious when a witness or a suspect suddenly remembers a critical detail long after their original statement."

Marilee jerked back to glare at him. "Detective Garcia, are you implying you think I know something I'm not telling you?"

"Now, Miss Anderson, I didn't say that." He looked down at his doodling. "I'm just trying to make sure you remember to tell us everything."

Marilee took a deep breath and let it out before she responded. "I have thought of little else since I had that dream, and especially since I found out someone was really murdered. The dream plays over and over in my head like a stuck video. I can't imagine I've left anything out. Do you have any ideas about what I could have overlooked?"

He didn't meet her eyes as he stood and pushed back his chair. With a wave of his arm in the direction of the statement laying on the desk, he said, "If this is a complete and accurate transcript of your statement, sign and date it here." He pointed to a line on the last page. "Also initial the box at the bottom of each page."

Marilee signed and initialed each page, then handed the statement to the detective. He flipped through the pages and nodded. "Will you be available for further questioning?" he asked.

"Further questioning?" She wrinkled her forehead. "I've told you everything I know, which isn't much. Why in the world would you still want to question me?"

Garcia dropped into his chair. "We might need to ask you some more questions." He rolled a pencil between his stubby fingers.

Marilee mentally counted to ten. "I can't imagine there is anything else you could ask me. I had a dream—admittedly the dream was strange and the timing was weird, but it was just a dream. I don't understand why the police are so interested in a dream."

Garcia leaned back in his chair and rubbed his chin. "Let's just say that experience teaches a good detective to be highly suspicious of anyone who knows too many details of a crime. Now, Miss Anderson, I'm just a simple cop, but I've been investigating crimes almost as long as you've been alive."

"I'm sure you're an excellent police officer, but what does that have to do with asking me the same questions over and over again?" She'd almost asked him why he was harassing her. Fortunately, she'd caught herself in time. She would not allow herself to lose control.

"I've never heard of a murder case where somebody that wasn't involved in the homicide knew specific details of the crime." He leaned forward. "You know entirely too much about the death of Barbara Nichols. I intend to find out exactly what you know and exactly how you came to know it."

"I ..." The cop wouldn't listen to anything she said, so she gave up saying anything. "May I leave now?"

He nodded. "That lady doctor on the radio has some ideas on why you dreamed what you did. You can go now, but we'll want to talk to you again."

After she left the police station, Marilee drove to North Star Mall. Maybe she could distract herself with shopping. Two hours later, she admitted she hadn't really seen any of the clothes she'd tried on. She might as well go home and try to accomplish some work. Although she didn't feel like eating, she stopped at a fast food drive-through and picked up a hamburger and fries for lunch.

By four-thirty that afternoon, she'd accomplished exactly zilch. She didn't even bother to answer the phone, but she reached over to turn up the volume on the answering machine when she heard a desperate voice.

"... David Nichols. I hate to bother you again, but ... I need somebody's help, and I don't know who to ask. If you could call—"

Marilee grabbed the receiver. "David, I'm here. Hold on—let the machine click off." After a short pause, she continued, "How can I help you?"

David cleared his throat. He'd reconciled himself to leaving a message, and he had to swallow his pride to ask for help. "I realize you didn't know Barbara very well, but I wonder if you know any of her friends. Maybe someone knows something about Welty."

"I don't really know who her friends were, but ..."

He began to think she wouldn't finish her sentence, but she finally continued.

"The security guards would know if anyone was with her when she went out or came in. There's always a guard on duty from six in the morning until ten at night."

"Okay, thanks. I'll be over there in about an hour to talk to this shift." He surprised himself with his next question. "Could I come see you for a few minutes when I'm in the building? Just to see if you've thought of anything else." He heard her sharp intake of breath.

"I haven't thought of anything else. I told Detective Garcia that. I'm telling you that. Why does everybody think I'm not telling them everything I know?"

"It's not that I think you're not telling me everything." David knew most people considered him aggressive under the best of circumstances, and these were the worst of circumstances. "It's just that ... that I'm grasping for something, anything that can help me. Right now you're the only person who knows anything at all. You're my best hope."

When she spoke this time, her voice was softer, sympathetic. "I'm sorry, but if I'm your best hope, you've got a serious problem."

"I do have a serious problem." He put great effort into sounding calm. "My sister has been brutally murdered. I know who did it, but the police don't seem to be doing

anything about it. I'm going to make him pay." If she took that as a threat, well, that's what it was. Welty would pay, one way or the other.

"I don't know what I can do to help, but come on over." She sounded resigned rather than eager, but he'd take any crumb he could get.

Less than an hour later, she opened the door as he raised his fist to knock. "Sid called me from downstairs to tell me you were on your way up." She held the door then stepped aside for him to enter.

"I talked to him first. He said Barbara didn't seem to have any friends in the building. The only person he's seen her with was the guy she's been dating." He followed Marilee into the living room and sat in a chair opposite the one she took. "I doubt Barbara would have told her new boyfriend about her bad marriage. She wanted to start a new life, forget her past."

"Why don't you tell me more about Barbara? How long was she married to this guy, what was his name?"

"Gerald Welty. They were married nearly six years. Barbara ran away from home when she was seventeen, and she married Welty within a few weeks." He struggled to control his anger. "What she ever saw in that scum is beyond me."

He thought he saw compassion in her eyes, but, if it was, Marilee didn't let the compassion stop her from hurting him.

"Why did she run away?"

"I'd rather not discuss ancient history. All that matters now is bringing Barbara's killer to justice." He slammed his fist on the coffee table. "Welty will pay for what he did." He saw Marilee's eyes widen at the crash of his fist on the table. "Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to take it out on you or your table. It's just ..."

"I won't say I understand how you feel." She smoothed her already smooth skirt. "I don't have any sisters or brothers, and I can't imagine something like this happening to my parents or anyone I care about."



David yanked off the tie that was already hanging loose around his neck. "I keep thinking Barbara is going to walk through the door or call me up any minute. None of this is real; it's just a horrible nightmare." He threw the tie across the table to land on the sofa.

Marilee got up and picked up the discarded tie and rolled into a neat package. "A horrible nightmare it is." Her honeyed voice softened the painful words. "But so very real. So very real."

She handed David the tie, which he stuffed into his pocket, only half aware of what he was doing. He looked into her hazel eyes. "I don't understand how you're involved in this. How could you dream about something you weren't involved in?"

The eyes that had been so soft with compassion flashed a more violent emotion. "Are you saying you think I was involved in Barbara's death?"

He looked at Marilee, in her prim business suit and severe hairstyle, and shook his head. "No, no, that's not what I meant."

"I've already had enough innuendoes today from Garcia. He as much as said I'm a suspect." Her voice rose several octaves. "He said he's suspicious of any witness or suspect who knows details of the crime."

David wished he knew what to say.

"He said he's going to find out exactly what I know and how I came to know it." She crossed her legs and tugged her skirt down over her knees. "I don't know anything. I had a dream, that's all. A nightmare."

He wondered if she was trying to convince him, herself, or both of them. "I don't understand anything I can't see and touch. I just don't understand how you could dream about it."

Marilee jumped out of the chair. "I don't understand this any better than you do. I can't believe it happened, but it did. I have no control over my dreams."

"Look, I've bothered you enough." He pulled his lanky frame from the chair. "I guess this isn't really your concern."



As he started toward the door, she laid her hand on his arm. When he looked at her, she said, "It is my concern. I think the police really consider me a suspect. Believe me, I want the killer brought to justice as much as you do. The quicker they arrest whoever did this, the sooner I'll be able to get my life back to normal."

"Well, I'm glad you'll be able to get your life back to normal." He knew he sounded sarcastic; he just hoped he didn't sound too aggressive. "Barbara won't ever have a life, normal or otherwise, again."

Those magnificent hazel eyes softened. "I'm sorry. The words are so inadequate, but they're all I have to offer."

He took the hand that still lay on his arm and led her to the sofa. When they were both seated, he said, "Maybe words aren't all you have to offer."

She wrinkled her forehead. "What do you mean?"

"You want to clear your name, right?"

She nodded.

"You'd like to see the man you watched viciously murder a helpless woman brought to justice, wouldn't you?"

"The person. I don't know if it was a man or a woman. But, yes, I'd like to see the killer caught and punished," she agreed.

"Then how about helping me find the evidence to get Gerald Welty arrested?" David hated asking for help, but he'd do anything to get justice for Barbara.

"What if he's not guilty?"

"I know he's guilty ..." When he saw her skeptical look, he said, "Of course, I don't have any proof. That's why I need your help."

"What if the evidence points to someone else?" Marilee looked directly into his eyes. "Do you want the killer arrested and punished? Or do you want Gerald Welty punished for what you believe he did to your sister?"

He grabbed his right hand with his left hand to keep from smashing something again. "I want the killer, Gerald

Welty, arrested and punished.” Seeing the expression on her face, he continued, “But if the evidence points to someone besides that worthless piece of scum, I’ll make sure I’m going after the right guy.”

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**M**ARILEE ANDERSON dreams about a murder and wakes to find it really happened. She and David Nichols, the victim's brother, become the prime suspects. Though they have their secrets and aren't sure they can trust each other, Marilee and David team up to find the killer.

Does Tess, "the crazy lady," know anything about the murder or is she just delusional? Does the cheating couple on the victim's floor have any information about the night of the crime? Why has the abusive father of the victim and her brother suddenly reappeared? What about Barbara's ex-husband? Will Marilee and David find the killer? Or will they end up in jail—or dead?

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