

## CHAPTER ONE

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If I ever saw my husband again, I was going to kill him. If he was lucky.

If I didn't have the nerve to follow through, he would have an even worse fate - explaining where the hell he'd been since Friday night. Here it was, Monday morning, and still no word from him. Our car was missing with him, and I'd had to walk all the way over to Greenville Ave and catch a trolley to downtown. Even that short walk had left me starting to glisten in the morning heat.

Not that I would have driven the car even if he'd left it, my nerves weren't ready for Dallas traffic, but still. I mentally added Car Thief to the tally of things I was angry

about. The list kept getting longer.

I glanced at the other people on the trolley, mostly the backs of heads. I doubted anyone else was wrestling with such matters. They all seemed to be quite respectable people. We were all respectable, heading downtown to work on Monday morning, trying in vain not to perspire in the humidity.

“Ma’am? Are you ok?”

My whole body stiffened, the boy walking down the aisle startled me. His little brow was furrowed, he was right at eye-level with me.

“I’m fine, thank you.”

“You’re crying?” Where were his parents, dammit. He needed to go sit down before my head exploded.

“No, no. I’m fine. It’s allergies. Go sit down,” I wiped the tear I hadn’t realized was there off of my cheek, angry that it had betrayed me so publicly. The little boy didn’t look convinced, but he went on by without further questioning.

I was going to have to get it together. The trolley would arrive at work very soon, and I had to be ready for the questions. Working at the same place had seemed like it made so

much sense just a few weeks ago, and now it had to go down as the worst idea ever.

I mentally went over my story one more time. Tom was sick, he'd been sick all weekend, and I didn't know when he was getting better. Some sort of stomach thing. That should deter questions. No one wants to hear the details of a stomach illness. No one polite anyway.

The trolley had stopped and I got down to walk the last half a block. Downtown really was so invigorating to see. So many people, so many new buildings. From here, you almost wouldn't know that there was a depression happening. The oil money that was coming through the town pumped life in, and there was optimism here that was missing from almost everywhere else you heard about. Really, who wouldn't be cheerful living here?

I glanced up as I walked into the lobby and waited for the elevator. I hadn't gotten over taking an elevator to work, it was still a bit fun.

"Pinkerton's floor please," I said to the old man standing at attention inside the little cabin. He nodded and I kept to myself, preparing one more time. Tom was sick,

he'd been sick all weekend. I had almost convinced myself.

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Dr. Mark, as he insisted people call him, woke up with a start and looked about, head swiveling and hands grabbing at air. The little man was sitting on a rolling office chair, and its wobbling added to the overall effect of discombobulation.

Once Dr. Mark's feet caught the ground, his movement became more deliberate, and a slower viewing of the place revealed he was in his office. He blinked and rubbed his face, then groaned as nausea and a wicked headache hit him full force.

Holding his head in his hands, he leaned forward to support himself on his desk. Why was he even at the office? He couldn't remember. His coat, caught between him and the desk, reeked of smoke and a smell he couldn't place. Sin, probably.

Sunlight was streaming across his desk now, bringing new pain in its wake. Where did that come from? There was talking, but he was too distracted to register it as anything beyond a background noise to the pain. The talking continued and got closer, finally resolving itself into words.

"Can you hear me, Dr. Mark? DR. MARK? Please say something!" The office girl, he thought, then sighed, head drooping.

"I can hear you just fine, Tincy. Please keep your voice down. I'm not well," he looked up through his fingers. There was no easy way to say it, "Er, what day is it?"

"Monday. DATEDATEDATE," she added, unnecessarily. He sighed. She was thorough, he'd give her that, but she bordered on absurd at times.

Still. What on Earth had happened that he was sleeping in his office? Why couldn't he remember? He sat up and pushed back from the desk. As the coat he had used as a blanket slid off, Tincy screamed.

"Don't do that! What is wrong with you? I am UNWELL," he groaned, doubling back over, hands protecting his face.

"Your shirt! There's blood all over it!" she pointed, mouth open and eyes wide.

He looked down and turned a previously undiscovered shade of pasty. His shirt front was indeed covered in blood, quite a bit. There seemed to be a spatter pattern to it as well. Whose blood was this? His blood? A quick check said no, not his blood.

A weak, "Oh dear," was all he could

manage. Tincy's hands were at her mouth now, staring.

"Could you go get me one of my surgical gowns?" He had to get the shirt off. This was a hell of a way to start Monday.

Happy to have something to do, Tincy took the ten steps to the door of the surgery. She opened the door, stopped, and let it shut, hands covering her mouth again.

"What is it? I need that gown straightaway, Tincy," his first patient would probably arrive soon, it wouldn't do to be covered in blood. It would make people nervous, hell, it was making him nervous.

"Dr. Mark," she was whispering while standing stone still, "there's a man in your chair in there."

"WHAT?"

"There's a man in your chair, and I'm not going in there."

Dr. Mark crept up to the door and opened it halfway. There was someone in the chair, covered in blood. Blood all over his face, blood all the way down his shirt, blood on the floor. With horror, Dr. Mark noticed some on the ceiling. Everything went black and he couldn't seem to get his legs to work, but Tincy caught him and got him back to

his office chair.

“My God,” was all he could say when his vision had returned. Tincy kept the desk between them and was watching him like a mouse considering the barn cat.

“Dr. Mark, who is that?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea. I... I don’t really remember much that has transpired since Friday.”

“Nothing? Nothing at all?” Her eyes snapped into suspicious focus.

He groaned and closed his eyes, but the bloody figure in his surgery dominated his mind. What do you do when you find a dead man in your place of business? What do you do when you’re covered in what is most assuredly that man’s blood?

“I remember having my regular Friday dinner,” Tincy nodded. “I ran into an old acquaintance, Dr. Evans.” His face brightened at remembering at least that much.

“Then I think we stopped at a... drinking establishment,” he looked guilty even remembering that. She looked as shocked as he felt that he would go into a speakeasy, but she didn’t say anything.

“And that’s where things get fuzzy. I can’t

recall anything beyond that— look Tincy,” he grabbed her hand from across the table like it was a lifeline.

“We’ve got to do something with that man in there. We can’t just keep him here.”

“We need to call the police, Dr. Mark,” she shook her hand free.

“We can’t call the police, they’ll think I did it!”

“For all I can tell, you did!”

“For God’s sake woman, why would I do that? I don’t even know him, why would I kill him? We have to move the body,” he was talking to himself now, looking down at the floor.

He moved his gaze to her. “It won’t just be me that gets ruined by this, you know,” he said softly. “You’ll be out of a job, and I don’t think a letter of recommendation from me will be worth much then.”

Tincy put her hand back to her mouth, tilted her head, and considered. She went to the door and changed the sign to CLOSED. Dr. Mark exhaled completely.

“What do we do now?” she asked.

“I’m not sure. I think we should wrap him in something so people don’t see him and then take him somewhere else and leave

him?" It was so hard to know how these things work. Dr. Mark wished he had seen more movies with criminal enterprise in them. "Was my car here?"

"Yes, not in it's normal spot though. You're parked in Dr. Bleeck's spot." Dr. Mark's face spasmed. The two men shared a building but maintained a clinical distance from each other. They did not have a relationship that had progressed to needling each other.

"Ok. Do you know how to drive?" he was hoping that her parents had been liberal about that.

"Of course. I grew up on a farm. If there's a shifter, I can drive it," her back was straightening as she said it.

"Good, here's the keys, bring it round to the back door. Leave it running and then come in, I'll need your help."

"You already need my help," she muttered as she went to the car. It was much too nice for how she ground the gears. The car ended up within spitting distance of the agreed upon spot, and she hopped out to go through the back door.

Dr. Mark was waiting just inside the door, in the hall with his front office rug dragging

behind him. "You're going to use that?"

Tincy's shock echoed loudly.

"Yes, what's wrong with it?"

"Well, it's an expensive rug...."

His glare cut her thought short. The closer they got to the surgery door, the more their voices turned to whispers.

"Do you have any helpful suggestions, Tincy?"

"No sir, I believe that we've reached the end of those."

"Ok. I'm going to open the door, and we're just going to have to go in and try to remove him as quickly as possible. I'll take the head and arms," he whispered over his shoulder as they stood before the door.

"Ok."

They both took a deep breath, and then Dr. Mark pushed the door open. They tried to rush in, but the rug got caught on the edge of the door, leading to Tincy piling into him as he struggled to pull it free.

Tincy managed to only squeak before catching herself on Dr. Mark's back. His soft "Oof," as his air rushed out managed to be the only reaction. Carpet finally freed of the door, they turned back to the objective.

They spread the rug out on the floor in

front of the man, and Tincy noted that the blood smeared very little. It was almost dry. That was going to be hard to clean, and she had a pretty good idea about what her future role would be in this scheme. Dr. Mark went over to a cabinet and pulled out one of his surgical gowns, which he quickly put on.

“So it won’t look suspicious if there’s blood on it,” he whispered. Tincy nodded back, wide eyed. It was surprising how fast they were starting to think ahead.

“This must be how people turn to lives of crime,” she whispered, “Grandmother was right about city life.” Dr. Mark ignored her. Gown in place like armor, he stood up straight and took a deep breath.

“I’m going to grab him and lay him out on the rug, and then we’ll roll it up and carry it out back,” he said in a stage whisper.

She nodded. He stood for another moment and then leaned forward, hugging the bloodied figure about the chest and pulling him forward.

The dead man’s eyes popped open.

“WHA INTHE HELL?” he roared and shoved Dr. Mark away.

Tincy screamed, Dr. Mark pushed back

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from the fellow and screamed as well, tripping over the rug in his haste. He scabbled backwards on the floor, arms and legs flailing, away from the not quite dead man.

The bloody man looked at each of them, and then back again, with no recognition.

“Where am I? Wha...

owwwwwwwwwww!” he put his hands on his knees and leaned forward, looking like he was going to be sick.

He seemed to be tasting something in his mouth, then locked eyes with Dr. Mark, who was staring open-mouthed. “Where are my teeth?” His tongue stuck out as he spoke.

Tincy screamed again. The man was missing his top front teeth. All of them.