A RAIN FOR TWO

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Chapter 1

I was in my office, at my desk, with my feet up on an open drawer and a pen in my hand, thinking about history. I had *The New York Times* folded to the crossword on my lap and was trying to remember our seventeenth president when my door opened and a woman walked in. She looked like she was in her early thirties, with blonde hair that looked natural and carefully applied makeup that made her already large eyes appear soft and doelike. She was wearing a finely tailored suit jacket and pencil skirt in a loden gabardine, and black patent leather Ferregamo pumps with a sensible heel. She took off her sunglasses, which were Gucci, and completely decorative in the gray Seattle afternoon, and tucked them into her handbag as she looked over my office. I noticed that her bag matched her shoes. Her eyes took in the black metal filing cabinet, the dying houseplant that Keau insisted I have, and the two straight-backed leather chairs, then settled on me. I smiled at her, to show there were no hard feelings about her interrupting my crossword.

"Are you Mr. Steven Parker?" Her voice was low and pleasant, and she spoke with a careful enunciation.

"That's what it says on the door." I brought my feet down to the floor and gestured to the chairs on the other side of my desk. "Please." She looked at the chairs again, as if their cheapness might rub off on her. "Coffee?" I asked. "I have it made."
“That would be nice, yes.” She sat, keeping her knees together and her purse in her lap, her back straighter than the chair and about six inches from the leather.

I got the coffee, adding lots of cream and sugar to hers, and sat back down. She held her saucer just under the cup as she drank. She touched her bottom lip to the cup’s rim and took a small sip. I waited.

“I’ve never met a private investigator before.” I smiled encouragingly, my hands quiet on the desk between us. “I guess I didn’t know what to expect.” Her eyes flickered to the gun in its shoulder holster that I was wearing, then back to my face. Her tongue crept out and its pink tip touched her upper lip, just for a moment, then disappeared. She seemed unaware of it, but I wondered.

“That’s all right. I’ve been a private investigator for years now, and I still don’t know what to expect.” She blinked prettily at me, her eyes wide. I sighed inwardly. Parker, master of the witty repartee. “Maybe we could start with you telling me your name.”

“I’m sorry.” She blushed faintly and looked at me through her lashes. “My name is Elizabeth Cowan. My father was William Chadwick.” I waited for her to continue, and when she didn’t I realized that I was supposed to recognize the name. I didn’t. Elizabeth didn’t seem too surprised; I was, after all, only a private investigator. She enlightened me: “My father owned Chadwick Industries, a large software company. We manufacture for many of the larger computer businesses, such as Intel-Pentium and Dell.”
computers as I did about horse racing---I picked a name I liked and hoped I
didn't come in last. I decided not to share that knowledge with Elizabeth.

“Well, Elizabeth Cowan, what exactly would you like me to do?” I went
to finish my coffee, but my cup was already empty. Elizabeth had only taken
one sip and balanced the cup and saucer on her knees. Now she looked down at
them, one finger tapping the edge of the saucer lightly.

“I want you to find out who killed my father.” She tossed her head back,
her hair falling over her shoulders in a soft wave. There were smudges of color
on her cheeks and a kind of strength in her face that hadn’t been there before. I
wondered if I was supposed to get down on my knees and bark, or something.

“What about the police?”

“The police are not involved in that capacity,” she said. “They don’t
believe that he was killed, and won’t listen to my reasons. They simply treat me
like a child.”

I considered. I pictured Elizabeth down at the precinct. She would have
talked with Callahan, because she would insist on seeing the captain instead of
just some rookie on desk duty. I saw her sitting in his cluttered office, the blinds
closed to shut out the sight of the whores and drunks as they got booked, and
heard her voice against the backdrop of slamming doors, raised voices, and
telephones. I knew Callahan would have listened as long as he thought he had
to to be polite, and then he would have explained to her that it was an open/shut
case, Ma’am, and that he knew what she was going through and he was sorry

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and that if she had any further concerns to please call the precinct and he’d get back to her as soon as he could. And that would be that. I knew I was going to take this case. Besides, I wasn’t doing anything else that week.

“What makes you think he was murdered?”

“He was killed in a car crash in Bellingham---he had run off the road and turned over into a ravine. The autopsy showed elevated levels of alcohol in his system, and the case was closed as a DUI accident. My father never drank, Mr. Parker, not since my mother died eleven years ago. So I know something must have happened to him.”

“Could he have been drinking without your knowing it? Was there anyone he had argued with lately or who didn’t like him enough to do something like this?” I wasn’t expecting much, and that’s just what I got.

“No. He would never have started drinking again; he had promised my mother when she first became ill that he would stop, and after she died he never touched any alcohol again.” She stopped, collecting herself. “My father was a good man, Mr. Parker. Everybody liked him.”

I didn’t say anything, just sat looking at her legs without really seeing them. In my experience, everybody always had an enemy.
I started with Daniel Cowan, Elizabeth's husband, seeing as William was already dead and therefore difficult to talk to. I left my office and got on I-5 headed north, towards the University, then took the 420 exit to Lake Shore. I wound slowly down the two-lane road, looking at the houses in their gated communities on the water, and the chic little restaurants and boutiques that lined the three blocks that passed as the Lake Shore community's hub. Past the yacht club and marina, there were more houses up the hill to my right, many of them nearly a century old. No matter how ritzy and pretentious it got, there was a part of me that loved Lake Shore.

The Cowan house was the last house on the water before a large park and recreation area. It was an old brick Tudor with three stories and a steep, sweeping driveway that ended in an iron security gate. I pushed the intercom buzzer on a speaker box to the side of the gate and said my name; almost immediately, the gate began to swing open, trundling quietly on its tracks. I parked my car behind a gleaming black Mercedes E-class and an unassuming silver Lexus sedan, got out, and looked around.

The view was something. The lake stretched away from a large green expanse of manicured lawn that sloped down to the water's edge, dotted here and there with statuary and a fountain. No lawn gnomes or plastic flamingoes here, though there was, I noticed, an ornate ceramic toad house. I wondered if
the Cowans knew what it was for. Off to my right at the water’s horizon loomed Mount Rainier, hovering like a mirage with a cap of snow dusting off of it, smudging one side of its outline. Even though I had been looking at it all of my life, I still stared, having to convince myself a little that it was real.

"Hello, Mr. Parker." A man’s voice, booming just behind me. I turned, and saw a trim man, clean-shaven, with sandy-blond hair that was casually swept off of his forehead. He moved easily, as if he was comfortable in his body, and his clothes fit him well without being fussy—a crisp blue pinstripe oxford with the cuffs turned back and dark gray slacks that were perhaps a bit too long for him; Armani, or maybe Bernini. He had on soft leather loafers with tassels on them.

"Daniel Cowan?" My voice still had a cop’s edge to it, even after so many years off the force, and I could see that it put Cowan’s guard up. His smile became harder and the shapes of his teeth showed under his lips. I reached out my hand, and he shook it, pumping it exactly twice and then letting go. His hands were firm but smooth. His nails were buffed and manicured.

"That’s me," Cowan said. "I assume you’re here because of Elizabeth." His smile became wider, almost leering, as he spoke about her. "I told her that she needed to let William go, but she can be so stubborn. I’ve found it’s better to indulge her at those moments." He gave me a look that said, What can you expect; they drive us up the wall, but we love them anyway. Well, I didn’t love them, but he didn’t need to know that. I smiled back, trying to look conspiratorial.
“She seemed to think there was more to her father’s death than just an accident. Has she talked to you about it?”

Cowan laughed. His teeth were perfectly white and even; caps, maybe, or porcelain veneers. “That’s a polite way of asking me if I think there’s anything to her ideas. I didn’t think private eyes could have such tact.” He turned and gestured into the house. “Please, come in. Elizabeth’d throw a fit if she saw me keeping you in the driveway like this.” I followed him through the foyer into a living room decorated in Missionary style, with linear wooden furniture and overstuffed brown leather club chairs angled in front of the fireplace. It was lit, but the logs weren’t crackling and burning—they were just sitting in the flames. I wondered what the appeal of a gas fireplace was.

“What can I get you? Sherry? Scotch?” He smiled a small smile. “Or perhaps beer would be more appropriate?” He thought he was funny. I didn’t.

“A beer would be fine, thank you.” He got me a Coors, popped the cap with a silver opener with a black leather grip, and handed the bottle to me.

“Glass? I have some frosted.” He gestured to a little bar fridge tucked discreetly under a green marble counter.

“No thanks, the bottle’s fine.” I made a show of looking around the room.

“This is a nice house. Have you been here long?”

“About five years now. It was Elizabeth’s mother’s favorite place. William had been saving it for Elizabeth.” He gazed at the marble mantel, his
eyes resting, I noticed, on a photo of a silver-haired man in perhaps his sixties. Cowan toasted it silently and drank.

I went to the photo, but didn’t touch it. “Is this Mr. Chadwick?”

“Yes, taken about six months before the accident, at his birthday dinner.”

Cowan had finished his Scotch and was mixing another, going very light on the soda. He raised his eyebrows at me, and I shook my head, indicating my half-full bottle. “Elizabeth swears he hadn’t had a drink since her mother died, but I don’t know. He ran a large company, went to a lot of dinner parties. He could’ve been slipping some in without anyone ever noticing.” Cowan had grown more expansive—with his second drink in his hand, he paced the room, coming to rest across from me, leaning against a many-slatted occasional table. “You ask me, I think he was pretty lonely. He never had another relationship after Cara died.”

“Did he ever say anything to you about that? Were there any hints, any signs that he was unhappy?”

“Nothing that I remember in particular. It was just something about him.” Cowan walked past me to the bar, and I smelled his cologne, something spicy and unusual.

“How are things settling down now after Mr. Chadwick’s death? I imagine there was a lot of work to do.” I sipped my beer to be polite, but it was weak and watery and tasted like old ginger ale. I favored the local breweries, and my current favorite was Henry Weinhard’s Special Reserve; it had enough
flavor to taste like a dark ale but none of a dark’s aftertaste. Also, it was affordable. I took another pull on my Coors. Only strength of will kept me from grimacing as I swallowed.

“Oh, not as much as we thought. He left everything to Elizabeth, she being the only child. But she and I are doing quite well on our own, and she doesn’t want to run the company. We’ve talked about selling it, but somehow it seems disloyal. She asked me if I had any interest in taking over, but I don’t know if it’s something I want to get into right now.” He was turned toward me, looking at my face while he spoke, and he seemed simply to be deciding what brand of coffee machine to buy instead of discussing ownership of a multi-million dollar company. I found myself believing him, and I try to listen to my gut instincts. It drove Keau crazy; he’s very reason-oriented.

“What do you do now for the firm?”

Cowan gave what he probably thought of as a rueful grin. “I’m a senior systems analyst,” he said. “Mostly, I go to meetings and have long business lunches.” He raised his glass, toasting what he’d just said, and drank.

“Can you think of anyone who might have disliked Mr. Chadwick, any unhappy clients or competitors?” I held my beer by the neck between my first two fingers, as if I had forgotten it was there. I was willing to go only so far to find information.

Cowan grinned, the expression changing his face from somewhat pompous to something unexpectedly charming. “William was a great guy.
People genuinely liked him, and he had a way of making people feel special even as he took accounts away from them. Sure, I guess he made some enemies, but none that would do anything violent to him. He was just a gentleman."
Chapter 3

I heard variations on this theme from everyone at Chadwick’s company, from his personal secretary to shift managers to his lawyers. It was beginning to look like I had found an exception to my rule about enemies---William Chadwick seemed to be such a nice guy that he was more of a caricature than a real person. I drove home to Capitol Hill in the Seattle twilight, going over what I had so far. Not much.

I stopped at a health food store in Laurelhurst and got some sourdough, olive tapenade, a couple of cheeses and some wine and then drove up the back of Capitol Hill to my apartment. I didn’t know anything useful about Chadwick’s death and decided to call people in the morning to help me find the real man under all of the social niceties about a recently dead person. I was thinking about how it was nearly impossible to get anyone to say anything but platitudes for a time after a person died, when I saw two shadow shapes stretching from around the back of the building. I saw a puff of smoke and realized I was smelling cigarette smoke. I had my keys out and my groceries in my hands, and would have to drop the bags and probably ruin a good bottle of wine if I went for my gun. I would probably feel pretty stupid, too---the fact that I saw two guys standing around smoking in a no-smoking building didn’t mean much. Maybe.
I dropped the bags and unholstered my gun as I ran, crouched low, behind the side of the entryway. I heard the bottle hit the concrete through the paper bag, and saw red wine seep through and pool darkly. If that didn’t get cleaned up soon it would stain.

I held my gun ready, trying to breathe silently through my mouth. I didn’t see anything, but the smell was stronger than before. I started edging back, to the other side of the building, being careful not to kick any pebbles as I shuffled around. I kept my head flat against the wall, feeling the rough stucco grab at my jacket. At the corner, I leaned my head around just far enough to scan the ground behind the building facing the parking lot. I saw the red glow of someone sucking in a lungful of smoke, then felt the barrel of a gun nudge against my skull. Bastards had come around both sides. Stupid of me. I stepped away from the wall, my hands out, my gun turned and hanging from my right thumb. A large hand came from behind me a took it, then patted me down roughly. As the hand felt between my legs I heard a deep chuckle, so low it was almost out of hearing range.

“Careful, Joe, he might like it.” The owner of the voice came around in front of me, and I was looking at a tall, thick, broad-shouldered man with a twisting scar up one side of neck that disappeared behind his jaw line and left ear. Manny Santos. He was an enforcer and worked for Frank Morris as a right-hand man and all-purpose secretary. Morris ran most of the whores in Sea-Tac, and did some small-scale business in blow. If it had to do with sex, kinky or
S&M or fetish or just flat-rate, it came through Frank Morris. Next to Manny and in addition to Joe, the fine gentleman still holding his gun to my head, there was another man, the smoker, who finished his drag and then flicked the butt in a graceful burning arc towards the parked cars. Embers burst from it when it landed, then went out.

"Can I turn around now, or should I scream for help," I said. Manny grunted a laugh that I felt more than heard and waved his hand. The gun left my head and Sasquatch stepped from behind it. He was huge, maybe six-foot-five, with dark hair curling from underneath his collar and cuffs, and his deep-set eyes looked small and piggish and flat, like the painted eyes of Egyptian sculpture. He put his gun away, emptied the rounds from my gun’s chambers with an easy spin of a massive thumb, handed it back to me, and then just stood there, arms at his sides, hands dangling loosely. He looked like a museum’s idea of the missing link in a cheap suit. I turned back to Manny, my eyebrows raised.

"Yeah, he’s a fucking goon, but he’s Frank’s cousin, so I’ve got him. Don’t know what the hell to do with him, except let him beat the shit out of people.” Manny sighed, looking old. “I’m supposed to be grooming him, for fuck’s sake. What the hell? How do you groom that for anything?” He stared impassively at Joe, who seemed not to be paying attention to anything but me. His dull eyes watched my hands, but otherwise nothing about him moved.

“So what’re you doing here, Manny? Besides babysitting. Did you miss my sunny smile?” I showed him my teeth. He made a gesture with his hands.
“This to your fucking smile, Parker.” He shook his head. “Came to tell you to lay off the Chadwick case or Joe here’s gonna be your new partner.” Manny was proud of his joke; he said “partner” again, softly, to himself. Joe was busy looming.

“Nice of you to come in person, Manny. I’m touched.” I tried to think of who I’d talked to in the past two days who might have access to someone like Manny. And I watched Joe not moving out of the corner of my eye.

“Frank told me come give you a friendly warning, so here I am.” Manny looked right at me, his broad face set on me like a satellite dish. “And now you’re warned.” All the things Manny was, he wasn’t stupid. And we understood each other in our own way. I knew he didn’t have to come out here and tell me himself, he could’ve just let Joe do the talking.

“If I’d known it was you, Manny, I would’ve asked you guys up and we could have had this talk inside with some wine instead of in the back of my building by the dumpsters.” I looked at Joe and Cigarette. “Though maybe it worked out better this way. I’m not sure these two are housebroken, and I just had my carpets replaced.”

Joe seemed unaffected, but Cigarette gave a little jerk and seemed to vibrate. The pimples on his pale skin stood out in vivid relief. “What was that, huh? You fucking asshole.” Manny was looking at the line of trees behind the parked cars, his head cocked to catch the call of a night bird. “Hey, you can’t say shit like that to me.” I could see a gun under his light jacket, but he seemed to
have forgotten it. He was moving in loose circles, his feet shuffling, with no real rhythm or pattern. I looked at him.

"Forget it, kid. You’re not gonna make it." I moved my feet slightly apart and kept my arms at my sides, ready. "I’ve been doing this a long time, and I’m good at it."

"Oh yeah? Fuck you." He came at me. He wasn’t too bad. He didn’t loop the punch or lead with his right. But he didn’t really know how to use his feet, and he used too much arm and not enough body in his swing. I picked it off with my right forearm. Then he threw a right, and I picked that off with my left forearm. I feinted at his stomach. His arms came down as he flinched, and I caught him hard on the jaw with a sharp left hook that spun him halfway around and put him on the ground. I was breathing easily through my nose. I could hear him snuffling with his face in the gravel.

Manny waited to see if Cigarette would get up, and when he didn’t he said, "Okay, Paul, that’s enough. Quit it, now." He looked at me, expressionless. "Stay out of the case, Parker. Paul’s a little nothing shit; we both know that. But Joe’ll take you down." Joe still hadn’t moved except to stay facing me as I had fought with Paul. "And I will, too." He jerked his head at Joe and Joe picked Paul up like a golf bag and set him on his feet, careful not to get any blood on him. The three of them got into a Crown Vic and drove away.
Chapter 4

I cleaned up the mess from the wine, threw the rest of the groceries away, and went upstairs. It was early, not even nine, so I packed some extra ammo and a change of clothes in an overnight bag and drove to Keau’s. He lived in a small, neat Victorian in Fremont, and it only took me ten minutes to get there. I let myself in, knowing he’d be in bed, reading. I opened a bottle of merlot and let it breathe while I cut some rosemary loaf, mixed up a balsamic vinegar and olive oil dip, then sliced some tomatoes on top and covered everything with gorgonzola. I would have preferred bleu, but Keau said it smelled like a goat’s ass and refused to have it in his refrigerator. I put the bread and two glasses on a tray, and took that and the wine up the stairs to his bedroom.

“Knock knock,” I said, pushing the door open with my foot. He was propped up against both pillows, his smooth brown body naked to the sheets covering his lap. He had an Oprah’s Book Club selection in his lap, open to almost the beginning. I could smell soap, cheese, and the warm clean scent of his skin. He looked up at me and smiled.

“I thought I heard you downstairs.” He slid over, smoothing the covers down and making room for the tray. “I was hoping you’d come by tonight. It’s been a long day.” I leaned over and gave him a kiss, tasting toothpaste. He had been waiting for me. I sat down on the bed, positioning the tray between us, and took a slice of bruschetta. Keau poured me a glass of the wine, but didn’t take
any for himself. He never did, once he had brushed his teeth. I always told him he could just brush them again, but it was just one of those things about him.

“Robert’s being such a drag about the new draperies, and I think I made a mistake shifting the servers around so much. Now no one’s working as a team, and my managers are going crazy.” Keau was the general manager for the downtown Palomino restaurant, and the things he told me about his job made me think I might end a day there by shooting everybody in the knees. His patience always amazed me. “What about you?”

I drank the rest of my glass before I spoke. “I have a new client. Woman named Elizabeth Cowan. And someone I talked to in the last twenty-four hours stirred things up enough to warrant a call from Manny.”

“Frank Morris’ man? Isn’t that usually a bad kind of visit?” He was looking at me steadily, not taking his eyes off mine. He knew my job involved this kind of threat, but he never let it go easy.

“Yeah, usually. But Manny just warned me to stay out of this case. No big deal.”

He stayed still a moment longer, then picked up the tray and put it on the floor. He took my empty glass from me and set that on the night stand, then reached over and laid his arm across my chest in a sideways hug. I put my nose in his hair, and hugged him back. I could feel the swelling of my knuckles from where I’d hit Paul’s jaw.
“Why don’t you go and shower and I’ll put this away and we can relax?”

Keau’s voice was muffled against my chest.

“I’m not sure I’m ready to relax,” I said, running my hand down his back to where the sheet draped over his hip.

“Fine. Then why don’t we just fuck our brains out?”

I got up to shower.
Chapter 5

When I woke up the next morning, Keau was already gone for work. I showered, shaved, and went downstairs to make breakfast. There was coffee done and I added three eggs to some onion and portabello mushrooms, scrambled everything together with Tabasco, and ate it with rosemary loaf toast and butter. Then I got dressed, checked my gun, put an extra clip in my pocket, and left for the precinct downtown.

The city looked fresh and clean, with the Needle catching some rare sunlight and throwing bright reflections onto the sides of the glass business buildings. I turned off of 4th onto Cherry and down towards the Sound, where the Bainbridge ferry was just docking. I parked in a diagonal stall that said Reserved for Patrol Cars Only and walked down the steep incline to the door. The smells and the sounds were always exactly the same, with the sour odor of sweat taking the lead. I headed for Detective Leary’s desk.

“Hey, looks like the private sector decided to come by and check on us poor slobs,” Leary said by way of greeting. “Connors, guess who’s here?” Leary turned to me, his face heavy and beginning to go to jowl. “Whaddya want, Parker? Need a date?”

“Not unless you’re free, Leary. You know I’ve always wanted to see what a real woman was like.” He grinned at me, and we shook hands.
“How’s private dick these days?” Leary said. Connors snorted from behind the desk and leaned forward and slapped Leary on the shoulder, trying to share in the joke. Leary just looked at him until Connors sat back again, then he looked at me again. “Getting any?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a woman right now you’d love. Elizabeth Cowan. William Chadwick was her father, killed in a DUI solo about a month ago. But she thinks there was more to it.”

“Chadwick, yeah. I remember that. She was in with the Captain for more’n an hour, talking about how daddy didn’t drink or some shit. Seemed nice enough. Real upset. The husband was a piece of work, though, right Connors?” Connors shrugged.

“What do you mean? Aggressive?”

“Nah, nothing like that. But he was off, you know? Sat out here talking while she was with the Captain and acted like it wasn’t no big thing, like she was just hysterical or something. Talked to Jeffries about fuck-all the whole time, then seemed in no hurry to leave when she came out to go. Took his time, said goodbye, that kind of thing. Nothing specific, just not right.” Leary shrugged, almost a mirror movement to Connors’. “Don’t mean shit, probably.”

“Well, since she’s hired me, I thought I’d better come ask the big boys what they found out first.” I looked to the office at the back of the room, with its slatted blinds. “Callahan in?”
“Nope. Went to lunch with the Mayor. Looking to keep our funding.”

He looked me over, seeming to consider. “The file’s on the wall.” He got up, stretching, and picked up his coffee cup. It was about half full. “Connors and me was just going to take us a little coffee break. Maybe grab some donuts. You know cops.” Connors blinked at him, surprised. Leary started to walk away, then paused, looking at me. “She seemed like a nice lady, you know? That’s all I’m saying.” He clapped Connors on the arm, and they went into the break room next door. I went to the back wall, got the file, copied it, and left.
Chapter 6

There was nothing new about Chadwick in the file, but I found some interesting facts about Daniel Cowan. He had married into the Chadwick family eight years ago, and it had been a good move. Definitely a profitable one. He went from being nobody to part of one of the wealthiest families in the Northwest. He had been considered as a suspect, but dismissed due to lack of evidence. He hadn’t been around Chadwick much before his death, and though he stood to inherit through Elizabeth he showed little interest in taking over the company. Everyone the cops had talked to said that he and Chadwick had always had a good relationship, and that they had never fought about money.

I had talked to pretty much everyone that the cops had, but this time someone I had talked to had been spooked enough to call someone in Frank Morris’ operation, and he had seen fit to have Manny come by to say hello. I was betting that Elizabeth didn’t know anyone in that circle, and, for lack of a better option, I decided to try Cowan again.

I called the Cowan house and Elizabeth answered. “Mr. Parker,” she said, pronouncing every letter in my name, “how is the, ah, investigation?”

“I’d like to talk to your husband again, if I may, to clear up a couple of details,” I said. “Is he there?”

“Oh no. Tuesday afternoons he goes and plays racquetball at the Club.” She gave me the address. “I’m sure that you’ll find him there, but why don’t you
wait and join us for dinner? We would be happy to have you.” She sounded as if she meant it, in a distant, rich-person sort of way.

“Thank you, but I already have plans.” I had nothing of the kind---Keau was working the evening shift and wouldn’t be off until two, and I didn’t even have a good book around. But I didn’t feel comfortable in the Cowan’s home, either. We said goodbye and hung up. I drove downtown to find Cowan.

He was a member at one of those uptown gyms that have little bottles of mineral water lined up in the weight room and a personal trainer for every client, ready to dab at their red, sweaty faces with a fresh towel spritzed with verbena essence. There were massage tables and racquetball courts and classes for something called Aqua Spinning, and the whole place seemed to be the new millennium’s answer to the golf course for making deals. I headed for the registration desk, where a perky young woman with a jog bra that barely covered her areolas chirped that the tennis courts were one level up. I thanked her and made my way through the throng. I knew places like this existed, but until now had managed to avoid them. Keau would love it. He looked good when he exercised and got hit on all the time. I sweat like a horse and looked as if I were going to burst a blood vessel in my head at any moment, and people tended to avoid me.

Upstairs there were Plexiglas-encased rooms with ventilation holes drilled in them that each contained a rubber-floored tennis court. Daniel Cowan was in the second one, facing me, playing against a slim man whose face I couldn’t see.
I watched until Cowan sensed me and looked up; I waved and gestured to the door. He nodded and said something to his partner, and they came out, Cowan first.

"Parker." Cowan was breathing a little fast, but he was in good shape and it helped. I could smell his sweat, and underneath that same cologne I had noticed last time. It worked well with his skin, and he knew it. He moved aside in the little hallway to introduce the other man. "This is Chris Rogers." Rogers mumbled something and shook my hand briefly. His was wet.

I looked a moment longer at Rogers, then focused on Cowan. "Do you have a minute? I'd like to ask you a little bit more about Chadwick."

"Afraid not. I've got a meeting at the Metropolitan Grill to go over some business, and if I hurry I'll only be a little late." I saw Rogers' eyes dart quickly to Cowan and then away. Cowan didn't notice. "Maybe you could come for dinner? Elizabeth would love to have a chance to cook, poor thing."

"Sure. Sounds great."

"Good. Listen, would it be okay if you called and set it up with Elizabeth? Let her know I should be finished around seven-thirty or so." When I nodded he smiled, and thumped Rogers on the arm. "All right, let's go. See you then, Parker." Rogers didn't look at me again, and kept his head down as if he were wiping sweat out of his eyes, his face turned away, but I already knew who he was.
I left, feeling the excitement I always felt when I had something to go on. A clue. I sat for a minute, thinking about what to do with it. I decided to follow my usual method---if you pulled hard enough at a loose thread, you eventually unraveled the whole sweater. I held on tightly to my thread as I drove away and headed home through the Seattle rain.
When I got home it was still early, just a little before six. I looked in my refrigerator and grunted; I'd have to go shopping. Good thing I was taking Elizabeth up on her offer for dinner instead. I dialed the Cowan’s. Elizabeth answered, said it would be lovely to see me, and to come around eight. I hung up, then changed into purple running shorts with black spandex shorts underneath, a white tee shirt, and a gray hooded sweatshirt with UW Huskies emblazoned on it in purple and black. I went to my closet, opened my safe, and took out a little 9-mm Beretta. I snapped in a fresh clip, thumbed the safety back, and stuck it in the right pocket of my sweatshirt and my keys in the left. The weight pulled the sweatshirt tight against the back of my neck, but it was reassuring. I'd feel pretty stupid if Joe or Paul decided to hit me while I was running and I got killed because I didn’t want to carry an extra fifteen ounces. I could think of it as weight training.

I set off at an easy pace down the Hill toward the University. No boats were waiting, so I ran across the bridge and zig-zagged until I was going north, uphill, on 15th. The university kids called it “The Ave,” and it was full of students, homeless kids aggressively panhandling and trying to look tough in their punk clothes and chains, and commuters trying to get to the 45th I-5 on-ramp. I went up to the QFC on 77th then turned left in a wide U-turn and came down Roosevelt until I hit the Burke-Gilman Trail, then turned left onto that. My
breath was even and my sweatshirt was wet and I felt good. Strong. I banked off the Trail past the UW Hospital, nodded to the Husky Stadium, and headed up the back of Capitol Hill to home. Nobody tried to kill me.

Twenty minutes later I was freshly shaved, showered, and wearing dark charcoal slacks, a pea-green wide-lapel silk shirt with a subtle sheen, and Diesel shoes and jacket. The jacket had a boxy cut and hid my gun. I used some Aveda hair putty of Keau’s, got a bottle of wine from the rack, and left.

When I got to the Cowans’ the driveway gate was open so I pulled in behind the Lexus; the Mercedes was gone. I walked to the front door and rang the bell. A few moments later Elizabeth opened the door, wearing a knee-length skirt and black sweater with a deep V-neck that exposed a lot of bosom. She must have been standing near the door to have answered it that fast.

“Good evening, Mr. Parker. Oh—wine, thank you. How nice.” She stood aside for me to enter, putting one hand on my shoulder as she closed the door behind me. “Now,” she said, smiling up at me, “what can I get you to drink?”

Remembering the Coors, I said, “A martini would be nice.”

“Gin?”

“Please, with two olives.”

A middle-aged Hispanic woman stood unobtrusively a few feet away from Elizabeth while we talked; now she came forward, took the bottle of wine from me with her eyes on the floor and a little nod, then turned toward Elizabeth.
“I would like another gin and tonic please, Mary. And open the wine so that it can breathe.” The woman inclined her head briefly and left. I wondered how many drinks Elizabeth’d already had.

“Actually,” I said, “the wine is young, so it doesn’t have to breathe.”

Elizabeth looked at me, her eyebrows raised a little. I made a tilting gesture with my hand: It doesn’t matter. She smiled, then led me into the living room. We sat, me on one of the leather club chairs and her on the sofa.

“I’m sorry Daniel isn’t here. He already had a dinner engagement and was unable to break it on such short notice.” She said it casually, but there was something in her face that made it sting---and the sting was directed at her husband, not at me.

Mary came in with our drinks on a little lacquer tray, which she set on the wooden coffee table between us. I sipped mine. Too much gin. Mary was probably used to making stronger drinks; Elizabeth’s glass was nearly half empty after her first pull. I held my glass in my lap, shrugging slightly to take the pressure off my shoulder holster.

Elizabeth noticed the move. “Are you uncomfortable? Those chairs really are much too soft---I prefer to sit on something a little harder.” She let a beat of time go by before running her hand along the arm of the Mission couch to illustrate. Her legs were crossed, and her skirt was pulled up, showing about half of an unstockinged thigh. She took a sip of her drink, looking at me over the rim of her glass.
“No, the chair’s fine. I was adjusting my gun; the holster tends to chafe.”

“Oh,” she said, leaning forward so far I thought she might be in danger of coming out of her sweater. Her drink was gone. “Do you always carry a gun?” She had a little trouble with the s, so that it came out _always_, just barely. Her eyes were open wide, and the pupils were very small, focused on me.

“Always, ma’am,” I said in my best John Wayne voice, and touched an imaginary hat to her. It came out sounding like Dwight Yokum. I cleared my throat.

“Daniel hates guns. He won’t even keep one in the house for protection. He says they’re dangerous.” She swirled the ice around in her empty glass without looking at it. “Are you dangerous, Mr. Parker?” Over her shoulder I could see William Chadwick’s photo in its frame on the mantel.

This was getting embarrassing. It was as if she was acting out how she thought a seduction scene should go. She’d be asking to feel my muscles and look at the size of my gun next.

“Mrs. Cowan, I’m a trained detective. You have hired me to detect. I have begun doing so. Part of that detection process involves getting to know both you and your husband, which is why I came here tonight. But your husband isn’t here, and you’re drunk, and I’m not going to sleep with you.”

Elizabeth blinked rapidly three or four times, then sat back abruptly; had there been anything left in her glass it would have sloshed onto the cushion next
to her. "You bastard," she said. She was hunched in on herself, and though her posture made her cleavage deeper, the overall effect was that of a sulking child.

I didn’t say anything. It’s something I’d learned over the years, watching over and over again as people dug themselves deeper by continuing to talk instead of keeping their mouth shut. It had the added attraction of making me appear smarter than I actually am. When you don’t say anything, people assume you know something. So I stayed quiet.

Elizabeth pushed herself off of the couch and walked to the sidebar. She poured herself a glass of gin, then splashed a little tonic on top of it, and dropped in half a lime. She didn’t offer to get me another drink. I hadn’t finished my first one. I was regretting the wine, and dinner; it looked like we were drinking our meal tonight.

"Daniel." It was a statement and didn’t seem to be connected to anything. I waited. I knew it would come out—she had to talk now, and it would be hard to stop her even if I wanted to. She drank some of her gin. I ate the olives out of my martini. I hadn’t eaten since eleven or so, and my stomach rumbled. Elizabeth didn’t notice. I wished I had more olives.

"Daniel and I met in college. He was in business, I was in art history. I had never met anyone who was so completely devoted to everything he did. Daniel had this energy, a kind of directed strength, that he focused on whatever interested him. Including me." She had been looking across the room and now
she turned and looked at me. "I had never been loved like that. So completely.
It was exhilarating." She dropped her eyes and drank.

"And now?"

"Now..." She trailed off, thinking about it. "Now it's different. He still
has that energy, but I see it less and less." She had started to cry, slowly and
silently, while she spoke. "I'm just not one of the things that interests him
anymore, I guess." She laughed, a small ugly sound with no humor in it. "It
sounds so typical, doesn't it. Just another failed marriage."

"Have you talked with him about this?" That's all right, counseling's
included in the detective fee. Dr. Parker, at your service.

"I thought it was just a lull at first, I guess, and that we were just too
settled in a routine. Then---" She took a deep breath before continuing. "Then
my father died and I was upset, and Daniel was wonderful. It was like we were
when we first got married. He would come home early, take time off, and we'd
go do something together, or just stay home and relax. He was so good to me."
She poured herself another inch of gin, not bothering with the tonic, and walked,
a little unsteadily, to the sofa. She fell more than sat down, holding her glass to
her chest. Some of it splashed down her cleavage. She drank the rest.

I leaned forward and took the empty glass from her. She didn't look at
me, but leaned her head back and stared at the ceiling. I wanted to know more,
but couldn't bring myself to ask her anything. She looked so lost, with her
makeup running and her body loose and unaffected in its posture. I didn't want
anyone to see her like this; she seemed guileless and soft, completely without defense.

Still looking at the ceiling, she said, "He’s the only man I’ve ever been with. I just hadn’t felt it was right before I met him. And now he’s probably having an affair. Some girl at work, I bet. Another blonde." She swallowed, the angle of her throat making it difficult. I didn’t tell her she was half right.

She rolled her head toward me; her eyes took a long time to focus and, when they did, they were looking in my direction, but I don’t think they were seeing me.

"I wanted to get even. To make him jealous. And I couldn’t even do that." She was crying again, lying there limp on her expensive sofa in her house on the lake and filled to the gills with eighty-dollar liquor and her husband was probably sleeping with another man and paying for the privilege. And maybe she was paying for hers, I didn’t know. So I didn’t say anything and I didn’t touch her or say goodbye, I just left her there and went out to my car and got in and drove away.
Chapter 8

When I had gone to sleep at Keau’s he hadn’t come home yet. But he was there when I woke up, and I lay there for a bit, feeling his warmth and the weight of his head on my arm. I thought about Elizabeth. I was pretty sure that Cowan was bisexual and that he was sleeping with Chris Rogers. I knew Rogers from the gay circuit rather than from my work; he was a regular at one of the bars Keau and I went to, and it was common knowledge that he was for hire, but not cheap. He was more than an escort, but not completely kept, either. He would usually have four or five devoted, wealthy clients that he split his time among and likely made a very good living. I was willing to bet Cowan was one of his current clients.

I kissed Keau good morning and took my arm away; he mumbled something and rolled over, exposing his back and shoulders. I tucked the duvet around him and got up to shower.

Half an hour later, I was in my car, eating a raspberry scone and drinking a grande latte. It was a vice I tried to keep hidden: I loved Starbucks. I had no qualms about spending four dollars on a cup of coffee, but felt my patronage would be misinterpreted if widely known. I rarely felt gayer than when I ordered a grande latte with extra foam. I refused to ask for it with a shot of almond, however; every man has his limits, and I drew mine at Torani flavoring.

I used my cell phone to call Leary; he answered on the second ring.
“Leary.” He didn't sound tired or energetic or in a hurry. His voice always sounded the same, and gave away nothing.

I pitched my voice low and said, “I’m an editor with GQ and was wondering if you’d be interested in doing modeling for a photo spread.”

“Fuck you, Parker. Whaddya want?”

“I need whatever you got on a Christopher Rogers, white male, late twenties. Don’t know his middle name,” I said, my voice normal.

“This for the Cowan broad?”


“Yeah yeah, forget it. I’m just asking, ’cause we got about fifty other open cases and only two-three guys on it, you know how it is. And something ain’t right there, and we know it, and so does she. Wait.” I heard him talking to someone in the background: “Well, tell him just bag it already and we’ll worry about freezing it later. Guy don’t need it anymore.” Then he was back on the line. “Look, Parker, I gotta go. I’ll call ya.”

“Thanks.”

I was hanging up when I heard him say my name.

“What?”

“I said, what was your photo spread gonna be about?”

“‘Fat, Pale, and Hairy: The Straight Joe,’” I said and hung up.
Chapter 9

Leary called back less than an hour later and said that Rogers had been arrested twice: once in 1995 for solicitation and then again in 2001 for possession of drug paraphernalia. In both cases the charges were dropped.

“Got any idea why the drug arrest didn’t stick?” He had been found with scales and empty vials, usually used for cocaine or crack-cocaine, and it’s easy to get a charge to stick with coke.

“Yeah, one: Frank Morris.”

“Morris? Does he own Rogers?”

“Sure looks that way. Jus’ protectin’ his investment, that’s all.”

I thought about it. I had figured Rogers to be self-employed. But if he was working under Morris, I had a possible connection: Manny had come to see me after I talked to Cowan, who was involved with Rogers. It felt right, but I’d have to flush it out.

“I can hear the rocks tumblin’ in your head, Parker. You wanna share whatever it is you’re thinkin’ about?”

“No, it’s nothing yet. Listen, you got an address for Rogers?”

He told me an address in Queen Anne, an apartment building. I thanked him and he hung up. I headed across town to Rogers’s apartment.

His building was 1930s-era brick, maybe twelve stories, with a lot of windows that reflected the muted gray sunlight. You needed a key to enter, but
there was no guard desk in the lobby; I guessed that when you had the kind of
visitors Rogers had, you wouldn’t want them to have to give their name and
check in. This would make it much easier for me to break in. I called up to his
apartment, and got no answer, just a generic voice mail. I hung up without
leaving a message.

A few blocks away, there was a Larry’s market, so I drove over and
bought a loaf of fresh sourdough, a couple of bags of chips, two boxes of cereal,
and some lettuce and bell peppers. I had them bag it all in paper bags, and
ended up with three full but light sacks. I left my car in the lot and carried my
groceries back to Rogers’s building.

There was a kind of alcove area where the dumpsters and recycling bins
were, around a wide L from the entrance. If I stood there, I could see most of the
lobby and the elevators, but I was hidden from the street. I waited while a
college-aged boy came out; men are less likely to hold a door for other men, and I
was in no rush. A couple of minutes later I saw what I had been waiting for---a
youngish woman, casually dressed, came out of the elevator and turned into a
little room where I could see rows of mailboxes. I made my way to the door, not
looking at it but instead shifting my bags as if they were heavy and inching my
hand to my front pocket. I paused near the door, pretending to be having
difficulty balancing the bags on my hip while I searched for my keys. The
woman came out of the mailroom, saw me, and hurried to open the door for me,
smiling as she did so.
"Thanks a lot." I gave her my aw-shucks-I’m-harmless grin and shrugged. She said you’re welcome and kept going, looking back once to smile at me again. *Ah, go on, heartbreaker.*

I got lucky with the elevators, which turned out to require a key as well; an older woman was just coming out, and we swapped places. I hit eighteen and went up alone. When I got out, I stepped into a hallway done in neutrals, with taupe carpeting and walls painted eggshell white with beige molding. There was a pale bamboo console table facing the elevators, with an arrangement of pussy willows and silk flowers in salmons and peaches. I felt like I was in a gynecologist’s waiting room.

Apartment 1812 was near the end of the hall on the right, close to the stairwell. Putting my bags down, I got out a couple of small, thin lock picks and knelt in front of Rogers’s door. It took me nearly a full minute to open, and I could feel a trickle of sweat in the small of back when I finally felt the tumblers turn home and I turned the knob. Nobody saw me and asked what the hell I was doing. I could hear a television from somewhere down the hall and smelled the faint odor of something spicy—curry maybe, or jambalaya. I picked up my bags, went inside, and closed the door behind me.

Rogers’ apartment was a two-bedroom, one-and-a-half bath with a large kitchen and living room. It was bigger than it looked from outside. Leaving the bags by the door so that I wouldn’t forget them, I stepped down the one riser from the entryway to the apartment level and into the living room. The carpet
was almost the same color as the one in the hallway, though it had a deeper pile. The decoration was modern, with a lot of glass and stainless steel and wood; the sofa and two armchairs were black leather, and there was a Piet Mondrian print taking up most of one wall. There were no books anywhere that I could see, though some magazines were spread evenly on the glass-topped metal coffee table, each corner matched up exactly.

I didn’t know how long Rogers would be gone, so I just walked through the place, looking partly at random and partly at typical hiding places. The kitchen had black marble countertops and stainless steel appliances. There was nothing in his coffee canister but coffee, and nothing hidden in his crisper or freezer. Rogers favored low-fat frozen yogurt and vanilla soy milk and seemed to know his way around a kitchen: he had several different kinds of pans, and his spices were diverse and looked used.

His bathroom was all white—white tile, porcelain, cup and toothbrush holder, and a white and silver shower curtain on silver rings. He had a prescription for allergy medication and a half-full bottle of generic acetaminophen in his cabinet, along with mint-flavored floss, tooth-whitening trays and gel, Q-Tips and eye drops. There was nothing hidden in his toilet tank, which was spotless.

His bedroom had a California king cherry sleigh bed in it, made up in ivory sheets with a white bed skirt and a white and khaki striped duvet cover. There were two cornflower-blue shams plumped in front of the regular pillows,
and the bed was made. There was a painting of a stormy seascape framed above the head of the bed and a deck prism on one of the bedside tables. Inside the drawers of each table, there were lubricants, dildos, anal plugs, assorted clamps and beads, and magazines with names like *Black Inches* and *College Jocks*. Nothing was taped to the underside of a drawer or tucked under the mattress. The only things under the bed were two pairs of shoes and an empty suitcase. There wasn’t even a safe behind the painting. Some detective I was. Where was the Maltese Falcon? The smoking gun? All I had was an apartment that felt more like a hotel room, an adulterous husband, a sad alcoholic wife and grieving daughter, and a dead man.

I left everything the way I had found it and walked my groceries back to Larry’s and my car. Then I drove back to the apartment and parked across the street to wait for Rogers to come home. It was a little before noon. I turned on the radio and settled in to wait.
Chapter 10

By five-thirty I was stiff, irritable, and hungry. I had snapped off the radio long ago, eaten most of the bread and chips and both peppers, and was about to call it a day when I saw a black Jetta pull up to the curb and Rogers get out, carrying a Bon Marche bag. He leaned into the car to laugh at something with the driver, then shut the door. The driver waved as he drove away, and as he did I got out and crossed the street.

I caught up to Rogers as he was getting his keys out.

"Hi, Rogers."

He jumped and dropped his keys. He spun around to face me, and his nostrils were white and pinched. He was good-looking enough for it not to take away from his appearance too much.

"Jesus, you scared me." He blew out his cheeks, picked up his keys, and tried a smile. It came out crooked.

I nodded. Understanding. "It's my daunting physique," I said. "I scare many people by my sheer physical size." I gave him a big smile. "But I usually win them over with my good looks and charm."

"What? Oh, yeah. Right." He gave a nervous little laugh, and his eyes kept skittering around, looking behind me and scanning the street.

"Mind if we talk a little bit? We didn't get a chance to yesterday." His eyes flicked to the door, then back to me.
“Listen, Parker, I really need to, um...” He trailed off.

“What?” I made my voice bright and widened my eyes a little, my eyebrows raised. “What do have to do? Do you have a date? A client, maybe? Have to wax your bikini line?”

“Hey, now, I don’t have to talk to you.” He started backing up and bumped his shopping bag against the door.

“How about we go eat something? Have a nice dinner, talk about Daniel Cowan—maybe Thai? How’s Thai Basil sound?” I had my arm around his shoulders and steered him away from the door and toward my car as I talked. I felt him stiffen when I mentioned Cowan, but he kept walking, head down and shoulders hunched in on himself, the Bon bag hitting his knees.

We drove to Thai Basil, a small restaurant that was almost a hole-in-the-wall, except that it had clean silverware and chopsticks and you couldn’t actually see into the kitchen from where you ate. You could hear the cooks yelling at each other, though, and since the restaurant was owned and run by one family, there could be loud fights and the occasional dish was thrown. But the food was good, and they left you alone while you ate, which made it perfect for sensitive discussions that involved pimps and sex and local Mafia name-dropping.

We sat at a round table by the windows. There was a pink tablecloth with small brown stains underneath a Plexiglas cover, and white napkins of that mysterious cloth used in restaurants—they don’t absorb anything you try to wipe up with them and they always fall off your lap and slither under the table.
The waitress, a girl who looked about fifteen and who had several jade bracelets on her left arm, came to take our order. I ordered spring rolls, sticky rice, and spicy chicken over noodles, Thai hot. Rogers had broccoli tofu curry, mild. I felt tougher already. We each had Thai iced coffee, which came almost immediately. I took a sip. *Starbucks, eat your heart out.*

Rogers had hung his bag over the back of his chair, but kept his jacket on. I did, too, but only because taking mine off would show my gun. I didn’t think Rogers had the same concern. Probably didn’t want to spoil his look, which was very urban modern: flat front pants, trim cut jacket, pink oxford. His hair was blonde and had been professionally highlighted. He had a tan.

"Rogers, what kind of fag wears a pink shirt? Even to go shopping?"

He flushed under his tan, but still didn’t look at me. He toyed with the settings, straightening the fork and chopsticks and lining them up opposite his spoon. He moved his teacup so that it made an isosceles triangle with the cutlery. When he was done, he folded his hands together and just sat there.

"Rogers, I know you’re involved with Daniel Cowan." No response except a blink. "I know that you’re a, ah, an escort, to a select clientele."

Stillness. "I know about your arrests." His mouth tightened, and he looked from his hands to his teacup. Good. Keep pushing. "And," I said, taking another sip of my iced coffee, "I know that you work for Frank Morris and that he’s the reason why you got off."
That got him. He raised his head and looked at me, a rabbit without a burrow. "What do you want, then?" he said. He was having trouble keeping his hands still; they worried at each other like small animals, picking at nails and cuticles.

The food came. Asian food is always fast, and you can usually count on the vegetables to be fresh and still have their flavor. Westerners cook their vegetables until they're soggy and tasteless. No wonder the U.S. eats so much red meat.

I waited until the girl was gone and said, "I want to know what the relationship is between you and Cowan. Is it strictly professional," I asked, wrapping a spring roll in lettuce and cucumber and holding it ready to dip, "or is it private? Or both?" I ate the roll, tasting pork and mushrooms and bean sprouts and things I couldn't put a name to. I had a spot of dipping oil on my sleeve. Rogers was still immaculate. Well, he was skinny and neurotic, so it didn't count. I ate some chicken, and felt my face flush as I chewed. Clears the sinuses.

"Daniel is a friend, that's all. He's married." Rogers pushed some tofu around on his plate with his chopsticks and ate a sliver of broccoli floret.

"Come on. I've seen you in the clubs; you're always working. You've got the reputation as a slave to your job, as it were." I had one spring roll left and had finished half of my chicken. Rogers had made no discernable headway. I tried to pace myself.
"Some guys are just jealous. Just because I’m with somebody doesn’t mean I’m working.” He cut a piece of tofu in half with a stab of his chopsticks and ate it. “I can’t help it if people think I’m a slut.” He glanced at me. “I’m not a gold digger, if that’s what you’re thinking. Men have always found me attractive and have been willing to compensate me very well for my time. I’m doing them a service, and I get to do some amazing things.” It had the quality of a rehearsed piece, and I wondered how many times he’d had to tell it to himself before he believed it.

“Does make it hard to date people, though,” I said. “Especially when you’ve got a pimp to pay. How much does Morris take? Half? Sixty?” Rogers looked as if I’d slapped him. I ate the last roll.

“He provides me with protection, both physical and professional,” Rogers said. His voice was very small.

“Mm-hmm. I bet that’s his apartment, too, isn’t it?” Rogers didn’t say anything, only watched me. “Right. So I’d say it’s more like a seventy percent take on your ‘compensation.’ And I bet you can give more as a payment toward the apartment. Does he buy your gear and toys, too, or is that out of your pocket?” Rogers looked ill; he was very pale underneath his tan, and though his hands were out of sight under the table I was willing to bet they were gripped tight. “No, that’s right; it’d be your clients’ pockets. Like Cowan’s.”

“Shut up.” Little spots of color had appeared high on Rogers’s cheeks, bright and angry-looking. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. Daniel is
a very giving person. He insists on paying me even though I tell him not to. He says it’s to help me gain my freedom.” His eyes were bright as he said this.

“Your freedom. Okay. He pays you as a prostitute to free you.” I finished my chicken; I was sweating. “Sounds like a great deal.”

“You don’t understand. He loves me. We have a real relationship; we’re completely honest with each other. We can share everything.”

“Including each other.” Rogers looked blank. “I mean, he has Elizabeth and you have Dick, Dick, and Dick.”

“You bitch,” he hissed. “Like you’re so much better, you and that little Martha you’re with. You’d already hit everything local, so you had to go for a little Hawai’i boy from out of town. Maybe you’re still a player; you’re on your own enough. Can’t get it at home, huh?” His eyes were narrowed and he was breathing fast, like he’d been running. Little dabs of spit had collected in the corners of his mouth.

“Still into coke, Rogers? I didn’t see any in your apartment, but maybe you’re expecting a delivery. That it?” I hadn’t planned on letting him know I’d been in his place, but he had pissed me off and I was feeling mean. Let him sweat.

It certainly got his attention. He lost all interest in Keau and my potential sex life and looked at me the way a bird does a snake. Unsure and wary.

“I’m not into it anymore.” He didn’t try to pretend not to know what I was talking about, not since I knew about his bust; that was good. He spoke
quickly. "I can't do anything like that; makes me nervous, paranoid. I'm too high-strung, I guess." He gave a half-hearted shrug.

"Sure." The girl brought us our check and took our plates; Rogers had eaten about a third of his. No wonder he was so thin. I unwrapped a toothpick and stuck it in my mouth, chewing the end. "So what's going to happen with you and Cowan? Move in together? Play house? What about his wife?"

Again the little shrug. "I can't live with anyone while I'm working, so Daniel and I have agreed that he should stay with his wife until I'm able to leave my job." He raised his chin an inch or so as he spoke.

"Leave Morris, you mean." I pulled a twenty and two fives out of my wallet and laid them on the check. "Do you really think he'll let you go? When you get too old to rent out, he'll put you in some shit job working where he can keep an eye on you. He won't throw you out until you're used up." I stood. Rogers stared straight ahead, not looking at anything. The flush was back on his cheeks and had spread under his collar. "Think Daniel will wait?" He didn't move, just looked at the empty chair that I had been sitting in.

I left him sitting there and walked out in the evening Seattle rain to my car. Maybe on the way home I could kick a puppy.
I was tired, and it had been a long day. I thought about going for a run or to work out, but I felt full and slow from the food and didn’t want to. I listened to the messages on my phone. There was one from my phone company soliciting a new long distance plan, one from Elizabeth Cowan, one hang up, and one from Keau. Elizabeth had apologized for last night, saying that she hadn’t been feeling well and could I please call her and let her know what I’d found out so far. She didn’t mention anything about trying to crawl into my lap or about our not actually eating anything which, given the circumstances, was hardly surprising. I’d bet she remembered little past saying hello. Lucky for her.

Keau had mentioned dinner at the Metropolitan Grill and then maybe the Cuff afterwards; I didn’t feel up to the club, but I could do with a beer. I dialed his house. He answered on the second ring.

“Hi, Snookums. How was your day?”

“‘Snookums?’ How do you know I wasn’t some telemarketer trying to sell you knives?”

“Call waiting, sweetie. Besides, you’re the only snookums for me.” I could hear the smile in his voice.

“Sure, I bet you say that to all the guys.”

“Only the cute ones.”

“Did you still want to go out?”
“Sure. Meet you there in half an hour?” I said yes and we hung up.

Twenty-six minutes later I was sitting at the bar in the Metropolitan, having rinsed off the smell of Thai food and changed my clothes. I was in all black, trying to channel Johnny Cash and sipping my beer, when Keau walked in. He was wearing a shiny burgundy D&G button-down with French cuffs and black leather pants with black leather ankle boots, and his hair was tousled and gelled. His skin seemed to absorb the light, turning a deep mahogany. As usual, people turned to look at him. He came over and sat next to me, squeezing my arm as he sat down. We were never very openly affectionate in public; it wasn’t so much a political statement as much as both of us feeling that it wasn’t really anybody else’s business.

“You look good,” I said.

Keau pretended to toss some hair over his shoulder. “Of course I do.” He ordered a Cosmopolitan and we watched the bartender make it and set it down in front of us. Keau took a sip, closed his eyes, and breathed deeply. Then he opened his eyes and smiled.

“Long day?” I asked. I still had half my beer left. No need to rush things.

“Very. Just the usual drama, but some days seem worse than others. How about you?”

“I just had dinner with Chris Rogers, after breaking into his apartment and sitting in front of his house all day.” I took a short pull of my beer. Hoppy. “He appears to be in love with my client’s husband.”
“Isn’t he that escort Sean played with for a while?”

“The very same.”

Keau frowned, his eyebrows coming together to make one wrinkle exactly above his nose. Even in the dim light I could see the velvety texture of his skin.

“Well, not to sound like a cynical old queer, but—he’s an escort.”

“Yes.”

“And he’s in love.”

“Yes.”

“I assume the man is a client? That he pays him?”

“Yes.”

Keau turned his frown on me. “Well, damn it, don’t make me pull your teeth. You know what I’m getting at, so what’s with the attitude?”

“I do know what you’re getting at. It bothers me too. I guess I was trying to see if you’d think the same thing, and I didn’t want to influence you by giving my opinion.” My beer was almost gone. I was feeling it; Thai food doesn’t do much for absorbing alcohol.

“Well, no need to make me feel like an idiot while you’re doing it.” Keau finished his Cosmo and nodded to the bartender. “Sometimes you act so smug, it drives me crazy.” I didn’t say anything. The bartender brought his new drink and looked at me. I shook my head. “You don’t want another drink? So why’d you come out if you’d already eaten?” His voice was getting a faint whine to it that I’d only heard a few times before.
"I wanted to see you, that’s why.” I drank the last swallow of beer. “I had a hard day and I made someone feel like shit and scared them and so I wanted to see you. I don’t feel like fighting, though; to hell with this.” I got up and left. I heard him say my name, but didn’t turn around.

I drove home. It was still raining. I picked up a pint of Ben & Jerry’s Phish Food ice cream and ate it sitting on the couch in sweat pants while I flipped back and forth between ESPN and the Food Channel. Then I went to bed and lay awake until about three, when I fell asleep and didn’t dream.
Chapter 12

I woke up early and went for a run. It was cold, and the wind and the exercise helped clear my head. I still hadn’t shopped, so I went to Starbucks and had a large black Sumatran coffee, a blueberry cream cheese muffin, and two plain butter croissants. Good to vary the routine.

I sat outside at one of their little metal bistro tables that fit narrow-hipped midgets and had my breakfast. It was a little too cold to be comfortable, so I was pretty much alone. I looked out over the Sound and watched the morning boat traffic. There were harbor seals in the Sound, and if you took a kayak out around the Arboretum you might see great blue herons nesting. You could also paddle under the bridge where on any given night you could get a quick blowjob or cheap score. The call of the wild.

I knew that Cowan was having an affair with Rogers and that his wife didn’t know. I knew Rogers was owned by Morris, and I had already had a visit from Manny, Paul, and hulking Joe. That had happened after I had spoken with Cowan the first time, at his house. So maybe Cowan had told Rogers, and Rogers had sent word to Morris that I was asking about Chadwick’s death. But why would Morris care? What was the connection to Chadwick?

I was willing to bet Rogers had more to tell me and that he had held back during dinner. I was also willing to bet that he had already talked to Cowan and told him I was looking into him. What would Cowan do with that? I decided to
go back and lean on Cowan some more; maybe he’d do something stupid that would help me figure out the link to Chadwick.

I sipped my coffee. It was dark and hot and good. I thought about Cowan and Rogers. Why shouldn’t they be in love? Then again, what kind of love is it if you’re paying for it and still don’t have exclusive rights? Keau didn’t trust it either. I wondered why I had left last night. I had been wanting to see him, then gotten my pride hurt and left. Screw you guys, I’m going home. Maybe Rogers was right. I was a bitch.
Chapter 13

Cowan worked in Chadwick Industries’s main offices downtown, in the Dexter Horton Building. I parked in an angled slot on the street a block up, ignored the meter, and walked downhill toward the water to the main entrance. There was a coffee shop, Pegasus, just inside on the left of the lobby. It had a sign claiming that it had the largest selection of loose-leaf teas in Seattle. I bought a short latte from them and admired the rows of glass jars with dried leaves and sticks and berries in them. The latte had a thick layer of foam on top and a protective cardboard ring around the cup.

“Nice foam,” I said to the girl behind the counter. She had a shaved head, an eyebrow ring and a small nose stud. She was also beautiful.

She grinned at me, showing teeth so straight that they had to be the result of orthodontics. “That’s what they all say,” she said. I put my change and a dollar in the jar that had a little handwritten sign on it that read, “Tipping is not a city in China!” and turned to go. On my way out I noticed an old-fashioned shoeshine stand, with one red brush and one black. I was wearing tan suede sneakers with black leather stripes, and wished I had on some wingtips just so I could stand there with my frou-frou coffee and shine my shoes. Starbucks had better be careful if Pegasus ever franchised.

According to the directory by the elevators, Chadwick Industries occupied floors 21 through 23, and Cowan’s office was on the top. I stepped into the car
and held my hand in front of my coffee cup as people pushed and pressed
themselves in. The smell of wet clothes and hairspray and perfume steamed up
from the bodies around me, and I was worried I might asphyxiate before we got
to my floor.

I stepped out of the elevator into the blessed relief of powerful air
conditioning and cool lighting. To the right of the elevators, several French glass
windows formed the front wall of a large waiting area with a ten-foot fish tank
bubbling serenely along one side. Everything was tinted in shades of gray or
blue, and the tank, with its bright backlights, cast gentle water shadows over
everything. It was like being in an aquarium. I wondered if the sound of the
tank made for more frequent trips to the restroom.

As I stepped though the door, a woman behind a curved desk in the
corner of the room said, “May I help you, sir?” She was sitting, and the height of
the counter was such that only her head was visible from where I was. The light
coming from underneath the countertop was a light aqua, making her look pale
and a little unhealthy. Probably a filter, I decided, rather than a blue bulb.

I gave her my best cop glare and said, “I’m here to speak with Mr. Cowan.
Please let him know it’s about the Rogers account.” I stood close to the desk, so
that she had to look up to talk to me. Psychological advantage.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Cowan isn’t available right now. Perhaps you could leave
your number and he can get back to you, Mr.-—?” She raised her eyebrows
inquiringly, where they were lost beneath a wave of firmly curled bangs.
“Parker. Look, I know he’s in there, and you know I know, so why don’t you just go on in and tell him I’m here.” I watched her face go smooth as she looked at me, and then she got up and went through a large wooden door with a brass ring handle. Cowan must be used to dealing with people who did what he said if his secretary was that easy to get past.

She was gone maybe thirty seconds and then the door opened and she came out and stood to one side of it, holding it open. “Mr. Cowan will see you know,” she said. She didn’t look happy about it.

I walked past her, smiling as I went, and into Cowan’s office. It was large and boxy, and Cowan sat at a desk that probably wasn’t much bigger than my car. There were two client chairs facing him; I took one and sat down.

“Parker, sit, sit. Sorry about Valerie—she tries to keep me from being bothered, and sometimes she doesn’t know who to keep out.” He smiled and spread his hands. *What can you do?*

“Fortunately, I was able to check her aggression.” I flexed a bicep theatrically.

“Oh, right. Sure.” Cowan paused, not certain if I was serious. After a moment he decided I wasn’t and gave a short laugh, almost a bark. It looked awkward and sounded worse. “Can I get you a drink?”

“No, thanks.”

“You sure? Okay. What can I do for you?” He looked around, then rubbed his hands together briskly. Ready to get down to business.
"I was wondering what you could tell me about your relationship with Chris Rogers."

He wasn’t completely ready for it, but he knew it was coming. He blinked and licked his lips, then leaned back in his chair and templed his fingers and looked over them at me. Tough.

“Chris and I have known each other a long time. We’re good friends, play a little racquetball every week, that kind of thing. And,” he paused for emphasis, and swung his feet to the floor, “I resent your asking. You have no reason to be interested.” He nodded once to himself. There. That’s settled.

“Actually, Mr. Cowan, I have every reason to be interested. Reason given to me, in fact, by your wife, when she hired me. Now, do I tell Elizabeth that you’re having an affair with Rogers? And that you pay him for that privilege? Or should I let you do that?”

“Damn it, Parker, what the hell is this? How dare you come in here and talk to me like this? You’re supposed to be investigating William’s death, not my private life!” His face was dark with effort.

“It’s my job to poke around and stir things up. I can’t keep everything neat and tidy. Usually looking under a rock turns something up, and this time that something is you.” I kept my face pleasant while I spoke, and my voice soft. Cowan looked nearly apoplectic.
"You son of a bitch. Who the fuck do you think you are? You are fired, Parker. Get out of my office, and don’t you dare come near me or Chris again, do you hear me?" His upper lip had little beads of sweat on it.

I stood. Though Cowan was about an inch taller than I was, I outweighed him by maybe forty pounds and he was aware of it. He leaned back. "Daniel," I said, leaning my hands on his desk and putting my face in his, "you are in no position to be telling me what to do. First off, you can’t fire me, because I work for your wife. Second, I will blow you or Rogers out of the water if you get in my way. And third, you couldn’t kick me out if you tried, and we both know it.” I stayed leaning over him for a moment, letting him think about trying. He stayed put. Maybe he was smarter than he looked. He kept watching me as I straightened up and pushed his chair back, and I could feel his stare like an itch between my shoulder blades as I walked out, leaving his office door open behind me. Valerie glared at me from behind her corner desk, and I winked at her and left.
Chapter 14

I had deliberately kept from asking Cowan about Chris’s work setup, or from mentioning anything about Frank Morris and Manny Santos, because I wanted to see what he’d do. I figured that he’d call Rogers the minute I was out of his office and that Rogers would call wolf. If I was right, they’d come to me. All I had to do was wait and be ready. And hope they wouldn’t just shoot me from a car as I came out of Starbucks.

I got in my car and called Leary. I got his voice mail and left a message saying he had been randomly selected to receive a lifetime supply of Speedos and to call Parker LaFemme for details. Then I tried calling Keau, but he wasn’t home. I thought for a bit; it was Thursday, which meant that he had the day shift.

I got back out of my car and left it without feeding the meter and walked north a couple of blocks to a corner florist. I bought a dried flower bouquet with protea and lotus and willow and put a single fresh red rose in the center. Then I walked back to my car and drove to Palomino’s.

I was standing in the lobby waiting to speak to the hostess when he walked by. He glanced at the lobby with a little professional smile on his face, then saw it was me and stopped. He stood there, a few feet away, and waited. I cleared my throat and went to him.
I brought the bouquet up. "I'm sorry. I was bitchy. I was in a bad mood and took it out on you."

For a second he didn't do anything, just stood there looking at me, his hip cocked out to one side and his arms crossed over his chest. Then he looked at the flowers and slowly brought his hands up. I thought he was going to take them, but he put them on either side of my face instead and leaned over and brushed my lips with his. It wasn't quite a kiss, but it was more than he was usually comfortable with in public, especially at work, and it surprised me.

"Does this mean I'm forgiven?"

"Maybe." He looked at me, and there was something in his eyes that promised excitement, and maybe a little bit of trouble, too. "It depends on how the rest of your apology stands up."

"Maybe I could give it to you tonight. Or would you rather have it now? Maybe in the walk-in refrigerator?" I waggled my eyebrows at him.

"Hmm, better make it tonight. I can only take a fifteen-minute break, and it make take a while to convince me."

"Your place?"

"Yes. After eight—I'm going to the gym."

"Don't work out too hard."

"I won't do my abs," he said, and smiled and walked away. He turned and lifted the flowers to me through the glass door as I left and I waved back, whistling as I went to my car.
Chapter 15

My phone rang just as I got to my car. I checked the caller ID—Leary. I flipped my cell open and said, lisping, “Spectacular Speedo Giveaway, LaFemme speaking. How can I help you?”

“God damn it, Parker, you can’t leave messages like that at work.” His teeth were clenched as he spoke; he was nearly growling at me.

“Should I leave them for you at home instead?”

“Yeah yeah, ya’ fuckin’ smart ass. Now what the hell do you want? I got better things to do than help your faggot ass all day.”

I told what I knew about the Cowans, Rogers and Morris, and that—since I hadn’t found anything out about Chadwick directly—I was going to keep pushing at the Rogers angle and see where it went.

“And in the meantime you just gonna wait around for Morris to whack you? You’re dumber’n I thought.”

“I have the courage of a lion, Leary, remember? And the strength of twenty gay men.”

“Which means my sister could kick your ass. You know Morris, Parker. He don’t fuck around.”

“Why Leary, I didn’t know you cared.”

“Hey, you get clipped in my jurisdiction, it’s just that much more paperwork I gotta do.”
“You big softie, you.”

There was a moment of that hum that tells you you’ve still got an open line when nobody’s speaking, and then Leary said, “Listen, you need someone to watch your back, I can take a shift. I never see Meg an’ the kids anyways; coupla more hours gone, she’ll never notice. Maybe see what Connors’ got going, too. He’s a irritatin’ little fuck, but he can shoot.”

“Thanks. But I don’t want you scaring everybody away; I need them to take a run at me so I can try to figure out why they care so much about what happens to Rogers. He can’t be that good.” A thought occurred to me. “Hey, you ever heard anything about Morris batting for both sides?” If he were involved with Rogers personally, that would make a lot of sense. It would also mean there was probably nothing more to Cowan’s involvement than infidelity, and I’d be back to square one.

“Nope. He don’t seem to care if you’re gay, but he’s definitely a ladies’ man. Used t’ have a different broad, sometimes two, sent over every night. We staked him out for about three months two-three years back, right after you left, and he was pretty regular.” So much for that. But it did keep Cowan in the game for me, which was good. I figured that whatever I was going to get on Chadwick was going to have to come from family; everyone else in his life had been kept at too much of a distance.

“Okay. And really, thanks.” I knew the schedule cops kept, and how much free time they had, which was pretty much nil. And protecting someone
was, for the most part, usually boring and cold and exhausting, and you did what you could to not have to do it.

"Yeah, no problem. Just watch yourself. I don’t wanna have to come ID your body." I was going to say he might learn something, but he had already hung up.
I was hungry, and decided on the 14 Carrot Café on Eastlake. It was after lunchtime, so I hoped the Carrot wouldn’t be too crowded; it was overrun on Sundays for brunch and did a pretty brisk business the rest of the time. They made the best wheat pancakes that I’d ever had, with fresh marionberry jam and real maple syrup, and I didn’t think that margarine had ever seen the inside of their kitchen.

I pulled out into traffic and spotted the Buick as I turned onto Eastlake. I could see two people sitting inside, and they didn’t seem worried about whether I saw them or not. They stayed two or three cars back the whole drive, and when I pulled into the Carrot lot they drove past without slowing. The passenger turned his head to watch me. I didn’t recognize either of them.

I ate lunch at a table away from the window, against the wall and close to the swinging door to the kitchen. I wanted to be able to move if I had to. Nothing happened; no one came in the front door, silhouetted against the bright gray day and said, “Hold it right there, Parker.” No one looked suspicious. And no one hit on me, not even my waiter, who was pretty cute in a tortured art-type kind of way.

I was wiping up the last of a spicy seafood omelet with some bread when my phone rang. The Cowan’s house.

“Hello.”
“Mr. Parker, it’s Elizabeth Cowan. I’m sorry to be calling your cell, but I hadn’t heard from you.”

“That’s all right. I’ve got some information, but none of it directly related to your father at this point. This is a kind of hit-or-miss business, and it can take longer than one might hope to track something down.” I was used to clients who expected everything to be solved and neat in two days; these were also usually the clients who wanted me to follow a spouse they suspected of cheating and who then didn’t want to pay me. I didn’t expect any of that from Elizabeth, and I was right. She fired me instead.

“No, that’s not a problem. I’m sure that you are doing everything you can. It’s just that Daniel...well, Daniel feels that I’m dwelling on my father’s death too much and that I need to move on. He has been so good to me through all of this, and the past few days have been as it was when we first were married.” I could hear how happy she was, how willing she was to believe him. “He thinks it would best if I make a clean break, as it were, and go somewhere to relax for a while. I’m leaving for Tahoe tonight, and Daniel is going to join me in a few days.” She paused, and when I didn’t say anything she said, “I’m very sorry, Mr. Parker. It has nothing to do with your performance.” There was no trace of self-consciousness in her voice when she said this, so I assumed she didn’t intend the double entendre and remembered little about my last visit.

“It’s okay, Mrs. Cowan. I think that’s the most pleasant firing I’ve ever experienced. I hope the trip does you some good. I wish you all the best.”
"Oh, thank you. And thank you, too, for being so understanding. You will send me your bill?"

"Sure."

"Please send it to the house addressed to me; otherwise it’ll get lost in the office mail." I said that I would, and she thanked me again and we hung up. I now had no client, no hard evidence relating to a case that I was no longer working on, and probably still had Frank Morris’ people after me. I also had nothing else that I was working on, and I liked Elizabeth. Besides, I was nosy. I decided to take things as far as they would go.

For the time being, however, I decided to go home. I picked up some groceries on the way---my mother always told me not to shop when you’re hungry---and drove to my apartment. I didn’t see the Buick again or anyone else. I unlocked my door and set my bags down on the kitchen counter, and saw that my message machine light was blinking. I hit play to listen to them while I put my food away.

There was only one message, and it was from Rogers. He sounded scared and left his number. I already had it, and called.

"Rogers, it’s Parker."

"Parker, hey, I didn’t know what to do. There was a car parked outside my building that followed me home this morning, and it had been there all day until a couple of hours ago. I couldn’t think of who to call.” His voice was high
and breathy. Under different circumstances it would have been funny—he sounded like a bad drag version of Marilyn Monroe.

“Okay. How many people in the car?”

“Two. I didn’t get a good look, but I didn’t recognize them.”

“Was it a white Buick sedan?”

A beat of silence. “How’d you know that?”

“Never mind. Do you think Morris sent them?”

Rogers didn’t answer right away, and when he did his voice was so small and soft that I almost couldn’t hear him. “Maybe. I think so.”

“Do you know why?”

This time he was quiet for so long I thought maybe he’d hung up. Finally he said, “I think so. It’s about Daniel’s father-in-law.”

I felt a quick tingle in my stomach. Here it was. I took in a big breath, then let it out, slowly, through my nose. “What about him?”

“I don’t want to talk about it now. Do you think those guys will come back?” I could practically see him wringing his hands. “I have to work tonight.”

“Rogers, listen to me. Cancel your client for tonight.”

“I can’t do that—it’s already five-thirty!”

“Tell him you’ve got a sore throat, or whatever you have to. Stay inside and lock your doors. Keep away from the windows, turn off all lights visible from outside, and don’t answer the phone or the door. Now—do you have a gun?”
“Yes, but I’ve never used it. It’s supposed to be for my protection if a client gets out of control.”

“So it was provided for you with the apartment?”

“Yes.”

“Good; that means if they are from Morris they’ll know you have it. It’ll make them more cautious. Is there anyone outside now?”

“No.” He was sounding better, and his voice was stronger.

“All right. Tomorrow morning, I’ll come over and we’ll have a little talk about Chadwick and Morris and the rest of it.”

“No.”

“Rogers, you’ll have to talk to me sooner or later. If you didn’t want to, you shouldn’t have called me.” I tried to be firm but not make him feel stupid; if he thought I was condescending to him, he’d never talk to me.

“Fine.” He sighed loudly into the phone, making a whooshing static sound. “But not too early.”

“I’ll be there around eight.”

“Make it nine.” He sounded petulant now.

“Rogers, I can come any damn time I want to. You’re asking me for help, remember? Just make sure you’re up to let me in.” I hung up before he could say anything else.
Chapter 17

I wasn’t too worried about Rogers; if Morris had wanted him killed right away, he would’ve sent Manny or Paul. The fact that Rogers didn’t recognize the men in the Buick, and the fact that they had left his place to come check on me, meant that they were still in the watch-and-wait stage. That was fine with me.

It was almost six o’clock, and I packed some clothes and a second gun along with extra ammunition in an overnight bag and headed to Keau’s; I already had a toothbrush and other toiletries there. I also took some of the groceries that I had just bought, since Keau’s idea of cooking was reheating take-out or microwaving frozen. I assumed it had something to do with working in a restaurant that made him unable to compose a meal in his own home. He’d eat Chinese from down the street or cereal every night if I let him.

I didn’t see anyone following me on the drive over, and no one was lurking in the bushes by his house smoking a cigarette. I let myself in and started some water boiling, then took a quick shower. I wrapped a towel around my waist and poured myself a glass of Riesling, then cut up some new red potatoes and put them in the water, which was boiling now, and covered them with a lid. Then I put some extra virgin olive oil, garlic, and onion in a saucepan and kept the flame on low while I added broccoli, Chinese peas, carrots and zucchini.
When the potatoes were done I took them out and added some pasta to cook in the same water with a little rosemary. I buttered the potatoes, then strained the pasta and tossed it with the vegetables. I covered everything and left them on the stovetop while I set the table.

I was about to go put some clothes on and get rid of the towel when Keau walked in. He saw me and smiled.

"Are you for dinner?"

"No, there's pasta salad and potatoes, and I was going to make asparagus once you got home so they wouldn't be soggy."

He put his arms around my waist and kissed my neck. His nose was cold, and when he spoke his voice was muffled against my neck.

"So you're dessert, then." I could feel his heart beating as he leaned into my chest. It was steady and strong.

"Actually, there's pie." I reached my hand around and pulled the towel off and out from between us and let it drop to the floor. "I'm more of an appetizer, I'd say."

He leaned back while keeping his arms around my waist, so that he had to crane his neck to look at me. From so close his eyes seemed to take up most of my vision, and I could see tiny flecks of hazel in the dark brown of his irises. His pupils were very large.
“I’ll try the sample platter,” he said, his Adam’s apple sliding up and down the exposed ridge of his neck. I wanted to kiss it and feel it move underneath my mouth.

“I think you’ve had that before,” I said. My throat was dry.

He smiled and stepped back away from me. He looked me up and down, his eyes traveling slowly, and tapped his mouth with a forefinger. “In that case,” he said, “I guess I’ll have a cocktail on the rocks and will try the blowfish.” He spun on one heel and walked toward the bedroom.

I beat him there.
Chapter 18

In the morning, I left Keau sleeping and dressed, then ate a breakfast of the leftover pasta from the night before. I had hoped there would be potatoes left, too, so that I could mash them and have potato pancakes; I managed to shrug off my disappointment and settled for toast.

When I was finished I loaded the dishwasher, drank some orange juice out of the carton, put an extra ammunition clip in my pocket, and went to my car. While it was warming up, I called Rogers; no answer. I looked at my watch; it was five to eight. Probably still asleep.

I made the drive to his apartment in a little over half an hour and parked around the corner from his building entrance. I dialed his apartment on the InterFone system by the front door and got no answer. I let it ring for maybe a minute, but got nothing.

I ducked into the building as the morning commuters left; everyone was pink and puffy from sleep, and no one gave me a second glance. When I got to Rogers’ apartment door, I pounded on it with the side of my fist. It rattled in its frame, then popped open; it hadn’t been closed all the way and the lock hadn’t completely engaged. I pulled out my gun and crouched low, pushing the door the rest of the way open with the barrel.

The living room looked just as it had the last time I was here, except there was a dead body sprawled on the cream carpet next to the coffee table.
felt empty, but I ran, still low, to the bedroom doorway and then looked.

Nothing. I went through the rest of the apartment, but nobody was there except me and a corpse. I went and closed the front door. No one seemed to have noticed anything. Then I went to the body and squatted next to it. Without touching it I leaned over its head, arching toward the sofa, so that I could see the face. It was Rogers. He had a small hole in his forehead just above his left eyebrow. Its edges were black. Small caliber, close range. I pulled back and stood up and looked at the body some more. Then I walked to the window and pulled out my cell phone and called the police to report a homicide.

Two hours later, I had gone over everything three times with some cop I didn’t know who had the biggest pockmarks on his cheeks that I had ever seen. I had told him that I was supposed to meet Rogers for breakfast and had found him the way I left him; his body had been wheeled out a half hour earlier after the ME had finished. I didn’t mention the Cowans or Morris or anything about his being watched the day before. My story stunk and the cop knew it, but he couldn’t hold me. He didn’t know who I was, either, other than what my license told him, and I was glad it was him and not Leary; I wanted to get out of there and find Cowan.

The cop closed his notebook, finally, and fixed me with the standard cop hard look. They teach it in basic training. “I want you where I can reach you,” he said, frowning at me. “Don’t go taking any vacations just now.”
"Wow," I said. "Now I say, 'I won't officer,' and you say, 'You'd better not. We know where you live.'"

The cop's face seemed to swell, and he shoved his notebook in his front pocket without taking his eyes off of me. Then he pointed a finger at me, jabbing it at my face; he didn't say anything, but exhaled forcefully and walked away.

I stood up, stretched, and looked around the room. Cops were everywhere; some were out talking to neighbors, some were milling around dusting for prints and taking notes, and some were carefully going through Rogers' belongings. In a garment bag in his closet they had found several small baggies of cocaine, a weighing scale, and additional bags and twist ties and other paraphernalia. There was no indication that Rogers did the coke himself, and every reason to think he sold it. Again, I wondered about Cowan.

I let myself out past the yellow tape across the doorway and went down the elevator to my car. There was a light drizzle falling, and I turned my face up to it. It was a beautiful day, I thought. A good day not to be dead.

I got into my car and started it up and drove away.
Chapter 19

I called Cowan's office, and Valerie, who didn't seem to recognize my voice, told me that Mr. Cowan was away from the office on personal business and wouldn't be back for two weeks. I thanked her and headed for the house on Lakeshore Drive. I called, but there was no answer.

When I got there, I parked on the street down from the Cowan place and walked back. I went over the gate and down the steep drive. The fountains were running, the lake was a deep, dark blue, and everything looked peaceful. I rang the bell.

Nothing happened. No Mary, no Cowan. I tried again, and this time I leaned on the bell so that it sounded continuously throughout the house. I could hear it, a melodic bonging noise that I could feel reverberating into my thumb as I leaned.

Finally, Cowan came into view and opened the door. He looked terrible: his shirt was untucked, his hair was spiky as if he had been running his hands through it, and his face looked twenty years older than the last time that I had seen him. He had a bottle of Courvoisier in one hand, and the bottle was two-thirds empty. He looked like he could have drunk it all in the past hour or two.

He looked blearily at me, his face showing no change. Just a blank stare. I moved him gently to one side, stepped past him, then reached over and closed the door. He stood there and swayed, blinking owlishly at nothing.
“Cowan,” I said, then stopped. I didn’t really know how I wanted to continue, but he did.

“They killed him.” He sounded perfectly lucid. If he had been speaking to me over the phone, I would have said that he’d had only coffee. He waved a hand in front of his face as if shooin a fly. “Killed him and let me hear it.” He wandered off into the living room, the bottle knocking against the doorframe as he went past. I followed.

“Who killed who, Cowan?”

He turned a wide eye to me. “Don’t know. But they killed him. I heard Chris crying. Then they sh-sh-shot him.” This last was almost coughed out; it wasn’t so much a stutter as it sounded caught in his throat. “I heard it. They called so I would hear it.”

“When did this happen?” The ME thought Rogers had died sometime after three a.m. or so.

“Five o’clock. Answered the phone thinking it was Elizabeth, that she had gotten in.” Tahoe; Elizabeth had flown out last night. “It was Chris, and he said my name. Then they took the phone away from him, and…” He was still turned to look at me, his body still facing the other way. The angle made his head look backwards. It must have been uncomfortable, but Cowan didn’t move. “Been waiting for them to come for me. Thought you were them.” He swayed slightly and took another drink.
“Why did they do this? What did they think I’d find out about Chadwick?” I didn’t want him passing out on me.

His eyes moved to the photo on the mantel. “He found out,” Cowan said. His voice seemed detached from his body, like it was coming from the room itself. “He came for his score, and I didn’t know.”

Things suddenly tumbled into place. Chadwick bought coke from Rogers. And Cowan was there as a client one night when Chadwick came. I asked, “Why did Chadwick go to Rogers’ apartment? Was that the set up?”

Cowan shook his head, almost falling over as he did so. “The Club. Usually did it there. But lockers were being changed, and Will came over. I was in the bathroom.” His eyes never left the photo.

I could see it happening: Cowan’s in the shower when there’s a knock on the door. Rogers sees who it is—he must not know the relationship between his buyer and his lover—and lets him in. While the deal goes down, Cowan walks in; naked, maybe, or compromised.

“So how’d Chadwick die, Cowan?”

He didn’t answer for a long time, and I thought that maybe he was too far gone, when he spoke clearly. “We had a fight; lot of yelling. Chris called for help, thinking there’d be trouble. But before they came, Will had a stroke or something. He fell down and lay on his side and didn’t move again.” He walked over to the picture and held it. “When they saw he was dead, they took him away and told us they’d kill us if we said anything. I went home and the
next morning we got the call he'd been found run off the road.” He looked at the
tpicture, holding it about three inches from his face. “You bastard,” he said.
“Bastard, bastard, bastard.” He was crying now. The photo dropped and the
glass broke.

I turned and left the room, standing out on the lawn and smelling the salt
off the water. Well, Elizabeth had been right—he didn’t drink. But he had found
his son-in-law cheating with the man who sold him his coke, and had died. And
all the rest of it had been the cover-up, and Rogers was dead. I thought about
Elizabeth. I didn’t think any of these truths would help her. I didn’t want to out
Cowan, and I especially didn’t want to hurt her. She was going to have to deal
with Cowan somehow, but it wasn’t anything that I could help with.

I started walking up the driveway to my car. And when I heard the shot
from inside, I didn’t slow and I didn’t turn around. I just kept moving,