

The Killing Hour

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Extract

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PROLOGUE

The man first started noticing it in 1998. Two girls went out to a bar, never came home again. Deanna Wilson and Marlene Mason were the first set. Roommates at Georgia State U, nice girls by all accounts, their disappearance didn't even make the front pages of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. People disappear. Especially in a big city.

Then, of course, the police found Marlene Mason's body along Interstate 75. That got things going a bit. The fine folks of Atlanta didn't like one of their daughters being found sprawled along an interstate. Especially a white girl from a good family. Things like that shouldn't happen around here.

Besides, the Mason case was a head-scratcher. The girl was found fully clothed and with her purse intact. No sign of sexual assault, no sign of robbery. In fact, her corpse looked so damn peaceful, the passing motorist who found her thought she was sleeping. But Mason was DOA. Drug overdose, ruled the ME (though Mason's parents vehemently denied their daughter would do such a thing). Now where was her roommate?

That was an ugly week in Atlanta. Everyone looking for a missing college coed while the mercury climbed to nearly a hundred degrees. Efforts started strong, then petered out. People got hot, got tired, got busy with other things. Besides, half the state figured Wilson had done it—offed her roommate in some dispute, probably over a boy, and that was that. People watched *Law & Order*. They knew these things.

A couple of hikers found Wilson's body in the fall. It

was all the way up in the Tallulah Gorge, nearly a hundred miles away. The body was still clad in Wilson's party clothes, right down to her three-inch heels. Not so peaceful in death this time, however. For one thing, the scavengers had gotten to her first. For another, her skull was shattered into little bits. Probably from taking a header down one of the granite cliffs. Let's just say Mother Nature had no respect for Manolo Blahnik stilettos.

Another head-scratcher. When had Wilson died? Where had she been between that time and first vanishing from a downtown Atlanta bar? And had she offed her roommate first? Wilson's purse was recovered from the gorge. No sign of any drugs. But strangely enough, neither was there any sign of her vehicle or her car keys.

The Rabun County Sheriff's Office inherited that corpse, and the case once again faded from the news.

The man clipped a few articles. He didn't really know why. He just did.

In 1999, it happened again. Heat wave hit, temperatures—and tempers—went soaring, and two young girls went out to a bar one night and never made it back. Kasey Cooper and Josie Anders from Macon, Georgia. Maybe not such nice girls this time. Both were underage and never should've been drinking except that Anders's boyfriend was a bouncer at the bar. He claimed they weren't "hardly tipsy at all" when he last saw them climbing into Cooper's white Honda Civic. Their distraught families claimed that both girls were track-and-field stars and wouldn't have gone anywhere without a fight.

People got a little more nervous this time. Wondered what was going on. Two days later, they didn't have to wonder anymore. Josie Anders's body was found along U.S. 441—ten miles from the Tallulah Gorge.

The Rabun County Sheriff's Office went into hyper-

drive. Rescue teams were organized, search dogs hired, the National Guard called in. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* gave it front-page coverage. The strange double-disappearance so like the one the summer before. And exactly what happened when a person went missing in this kind of heat.

The man noticed something he'd missed before. It was small, really. A minor little note under letters to the editor. It read: "Clock ticking . . . planet dying . . . animals weeping . . . rivers screaming. Can't you hear it? Heat kills . . ."

Then the man knew why he'd started the scrapbook.

They never did find Kasey Cooper in the gorge. Her body didn't turn up until the November cotton harvest in Burke County. Then, three men operating a cotton picker got the surprise of their lives—a dead girl right smack in the middle of thousands of acres of cotton fields, still wearing a little black dress.

No broken bones this time. No shattered limbs. The ME ruled that nineteen-year-old Kasey Cooper had died from multiple organ failure, most likely brought on by severe heatstroke. In other words, when she'd been abandoned out in the middle of that field, she'd still been alive.

An empty gallon jug of water was discovered three miles from her mummified corpse. Her purse was another five miles away. Interestingly enough, they never did find her vehicle or her car keys.

People grew more nervous now. Particularly when someone in the ME's office let it leak that Josie Anders also had died from a drug overdose—a fatal injection of the prescription drug Ativan. Seemed sinister somehow. Two sets of girls in two different years. Each last seen in a bar. In both cases the first girl was found dead along a major road. And in both cases, the second girl seemed to suffer a fate that was far, far worse . . .

The Rabun County Sheriff's Office called in the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. The press got excited again. More banner headlines in the front pages of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. GBI SEEKS POSSIBLE SERIAL KILLER. Rumors flew, articles multiplied and the man clipped each one diligently.

He had a cold feeling growing in his chest now. And he started to tremble each time the phone rang.

The GBI, however, was not nearly so sensational about the case. Investigation ongoing, a spokesperson for the state police declared. And that's all the GBI would say. Until the summer of 2000 and the very first heat wave.

It started in May. Two pretty, young Augusta State University students headed to Savannah one weekend and never returned home. Last known sighting—a bar. Vehicle—MIA.

This time, the national media descended. Frightened voters hit the streets. The man pawed furiously through stacks of newspapers while the GBI issued meaningless statements such as “We have no reason to suspect a connection at this time.”

The man knew better. People knew better. And so did the letters to the editor. He found it Tuesday, May 30. Exact same words as before: “Clock ticking . . . planet dying . . . animals weeping . . . rivers screaming. Can't you hear it? Heat kills . . .”

Celia Smithers's body was found along U.S. 25 in Waynesboro, just fifteen miles from the cotton-field crime scene where Kasey Cooper had been found six months before. Smithers was fully clothed and clutching her purse. No sign of trauma, no sign of sexual assault. Just one dark bruise on her left thigh, and a smaller, red injection site on her upper left arm. Cause of death—an overdose of the prescription tranquilizer Ativan.

The public went nuts; the police immediately went

into high gear. Still missing, Smithers's best friend, Tamara McDaniels. The police, however, didn't search the Burke County cotton fields. Instead, they sent volunteers straight to the muddy banks of the Savannah River. Finally, the man thought, they were starting to understand the game.

He should've picked up the phone then. Dialed the hastily established hotline. He could've been an anonymous tipster. Or maybe the crazy whacko that thinks he knows everything.

He didn't, though. He just didn't know what to say.

"We have reason to believe Ms. McDaniels is still alive," reported GBI Special Agent Michael "Mac" McCormack on the evening news. "We believe our suspect kidnaps the women in pairs, killing the first woman immediately, but abandoning the second in a remote location. In this case, we have reason to believe he has selected a portion of the Savannah River. We are now assembling over five hundred volunteers to search the river. It is our goal to bring Tamara home safe."

Then Special Agent McCormack made a startling revelation. He had also been reading the letters to the editor. He now made an appeal to speak to the author of the notes. The police were eager to listen. The police were eager to help.

By the eleven o'clock news, search-and-rescue teams had descended upon the Savannah River and the suspect finally had a name. The Eco-Killer, Fox News dubbed him. A crazed lunatic who no doubt thought that killing women really would save the planet. Jack the Ripper, he ain't.

The man wanted to yell at them. He wanted to scream that they knew nothing. But of course, what could he say? He watched the news. He obsessively clipped articles. He attended a candlelight vigil organized by the frantic parents of poor Tamara McDaniels—last seen in a tight black skirt and platform heels.

No body this time; the Savannah River rarely gives up what she has taken.

But 2000 hadn't ended yet.

July. Temperatures soared above one hundred degrees in the shade. And two sisters, Mary Lynn and Nora Ray Watts, met up with friends at T.G.I. Friday's for late-night sundaes to beat the heat. The two girls disappeared somewhere along the dark, winding road leading home.

Mary Lynn was found two days later alongside U.S. 301 near the Savannah River. The temperature that day was 103 degrees. Heat index was 118. Her body contained a faintly striped brown shell crammed down her throat. Bits of grass and mud were streaked across her legs.

The police tried to bury these details, as they'd buried so many others. Once again, an ME's office insider ratted them out.

For the first time the public learned what the police had known—what the man had suspected—for the past twelve months. Why the first girl was always left, easy to discover, next to a major road. Why her death came so quickly. Why the man needed two girls at all. Because the first girl was merely a prop, a disposable tool necessary for the game. She was the map. Interpret the clues correctly, and maybe you could find the second girl still alive. If you moved quickly enough. *If you beat the heat.*

The task force descended, the press corps descended, and Special Agent McCormack went on the news to announce that given the presence of sea salt, cord grass, and the marsh periwinkle snail found on Mary Lynn's body, he was authorizing an all-out search of Georgia's 378,000 acres of salt marshes.

But which part, you idiots? the man scribbled in his scrapbook. *You should know him better than that by now. Clock is TICKING!*

"We have reason to believe that Nora Ray is still

alive,” Special Agent McCormack announced, as he had announced once before. “And we’re going to bring her home to her family.”

Don’t make promises you can’t keep, the man wrote. But finally, he was wrong.

The last article in an overstuffed scrapbook: July 27, 2000. Nora Ray Watts is pulled half-naked from the sucking depths of a Georgia salt marsh. The Eco-Killer’s eighth victim, she’s survived fifty-six hours in hundred-degree heat, burning sun, and parching salt, by chewing cord grass and coating herself in protective mud. Now, a newspaper photo shows her exuberantly, vibrantly, triumphantly alive as the Coast Guard chopper lifts her up into the blue, blue sky.

The police have finally learned the game. They have finally won.

Last page of the scrapbook now. No news articles, no photos, no evening news transcripts. In the last page of the scrapbook, the man wrote only four neatly printed words: *What if I’m wrong?*

Then, he underlined them.

The year 2000 finally ended. Nora Ray Watts lived. And the Eco-Killer never struck again. Summers came, summers went. Heat waves rolled through Georgia and lambasted the good residents with spiking temperatures and prickling fear. And nothing happened.

Three years later, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* ran a retrospective. They interviewed Special Agent McCormack about the seven unsolved homicides, the three summers of crippling fear. He simply said, “Our investigation is ongoing.”

The man didn’t save that article. Instead, he crumpled it up and threw it into the trash. Then he drank long and heavily deep into the night.

It’s over, he thought. It’s over, I’m safe, and it’s as simple as that.

But he already knew in his heart that he was wrong.
For some things, it's never a matter of if, but only a
matter of when . . .

I

Quantico, Virginia

3:59 P.M.

Temperature: 95 degrees

“God, it’s hot. Cacti couldn’t take this kind of heat. Desert rock couldn’t take this kind of heat. I’m telling you, this is what happened right before dinosaurs disappeared from the Earth.”

No response.

“You really think orange is my color?” the driver tried again.

“*Really* is a strong word.”

“Well, not everyone can make a statement in purple plaid.”

“True.”

“Man-oh-man, is this heat *killing* me!” The driver, New Agent Alissa Sampson, had had enough. She tugged futilely on her 1970s polyester suit, smacked the steering wheel with the palm of her hand, then blew out an exasperated breath. It was ninety-five outside, probably one hundred and ten inside the Bucar. Not great weather for polyester suits. For that matter, it didn’t work wonders for bulletproof vests. Alissa’s suit bled bright orange stains under her arms. New Agent Kimberly Quincy’s own mothball-scented pink-and-purple plaid suit didn’t look much better.

Outside the car, the street was quiet. Nothing happening at Billiards; nothing happening at City Pawn; nothing happening at the Pastime Bar-Deli. Minute ticked into minute. Seconds came and went, as slowly as

the bead of sweat trickling down Kimberly's cheek. Above her head, still fastened to the roof but ready to go at any minute, was her M-16.

"Here's something they never tell you about the disco age," Alissa muttered beside her. "Polyester doesn't breathe. God, is this thing going to happen or *what?*"

Alissa was definitely nervous. A forensic accountant before joining the Bureau, she was highly valued for her deep-seated love of all things spreadsheet. Give Alissa a computer and she was in hog heaven. This, however, wasn't a back-room gig. This was front-line duty.

In theory, at any time now, a black vehicle bearing a two-hundred-and-ten-pound heavily armed suspected arms dealer was going to appear. He might or might not be alone in the car. Kimberly, Alissa, and three other agents had orders to halt the vehicle and arrest everyone in sight.

Phil Lehane, a former New York cop and the one with the most street experience, was leading the operation. Tom Squire and Peter Vince were in the first of the two backup vehicles. Alissa and Kimberly were in the second backup. Kimberly and Tom, being above-average marksmen, had cover duty with the rifles. Alissa and Peter were in charge of tactical driving, plus had handguns for cover.

In consummate FBI style, they had not only planned and dressed for this arrest, but they had practiced it in advance. During the initial run-through, however, Alissa had tripped when getting out of the car and had landed on her face. Her upper lip was still swollen and there were flecks of blood on the right-hand corner of her mouth.

Her wounds were superficial. Her anxiety, however, now went bone deep.

"This is taking too long," she was muttering. "I

thought he was supposed to appear at the bank at four. It's four-ten. I don't think he's coming."

"People run late."

"They do this just to mess with our minds. Aren't you boiling?"

Kimberly finally looked at her partner. When Alissa was nervous, she babbled. When Kimberly was nervous, she grew clipped and curt. These days, she was clipped and curt most of the time. "The guy will show up when the guy shows up. Now chill out!"

Alissa thinned her lips. For a second, something flared in her bright blue eyes. Anger. Hurt. Embarrassment. It was hard to be sure. Kimberly was another woman in the male-run world of the Bureau, so criticism coming from her was akin to blasphemy. They were supposed to stick together. Girl power, the Ya Ya Sisterhood, and all that crap.

Kimberly went back to gazing at the street. Now she was angry, too. Damn. Double-damn. Shit.

The radio on the dash suddenly crackled to life. Alissa swooped up the receiver without bothering to hide her relief.

Phil Lehané's voice was hushed but steady: "This is Vehicle A. Target now in sight, climbing into his vehicle. Ready, Vehicle B?"

"Ready."

"Ready, Vehicle C?"

Alissa clicked the receiver. "Ready, willing, and able."

"We go on three. One, two, THREE."

The first siren exploded across the hot, sweltering street, and even though Kimberly had been expecting the noise, she still flinched in her seat.

"Easy," Alissa said dryly, then fired the Bucar to life. A blast of hot air promptly burst from the vents into their faces, but now both were too grim to notice. Kimberly reached for her rifle. Alissa's foot hovered above the gas.

The sirens screamed closer. Not yet, not yet . . .

"FBI, stop your vehicle!" Lehane's voice blared over a bullhorn two blocks away as he drove the suspect closer to their side street. Their target had a penchant for armor-plated Mercedes and grenade launchers. In theory, they were going to arrest him while he was out running errands, hopefully catching him off guard and relatively unarmed. In theory.

"Stop your vehicle!" Lehane commanded again. Apparently, however, the target didn't feel like playing nice today. Far from hearing the screech of brakes, Alissa and Kimberly caught the sound of a gunning engine. Alissa's foot lowered farther toward the gas.

"Passing the movie theater," New Agent Lehane barked over the radio. "Suspect heading toward the pharmacy. Ready . . . Go."

Alissa slammed the gas and their dark blue Bucar shot forward into the empty street. A sleek black blur appeared immediately to their left. Alissa hit the brakes, swinging the back end of their car around until they were pointed down the street at a forty-five-degree angle. Simultaneously, another Bucar appeared on their right, blocking that lane.

Kimberly now had a full view of a beautiful silver grille gunning down on them with a proud Mercedes logo. She popped open the passenger's door while simultaneously releasing her seat belt, then hefted her rifle to her shoulder and aimed for the front tire.

Her finger tightened on the trigger.

The suspect finally hit his brakes. A short screech. The smell of burning rubber. Then the car stopped just fifteen feet away.

"FBI, hands on your head! HANDS ON YOUR HEAD!"

Lehane pulled in behind the Mercedes, shouting into the bullhorn with commanding fury. He kicked open his

door, fit his handgun into the opening made between the window frame and the door and drew a bead on the stopped car. No hands left for the bullhorn now. He let his voice do the work for him.

“Driver, hands on your head! Driver, reach over with your left hand and lower your windows!”

The black sedan didn’t move. No doors opening, no black-tinted windows rolling down. Not a good sign. Kimberly adjusted her left hand on the stock of the rifle and shrugged off the rest of her seat belt. She kept her feet in the car, as feet could become targets. She kept her head and shoulders inside the vehicle as well. On a good day, all you wanted the felon to see was the long black barrel of your gun. She didn’t know if this was a good day yet.

A fresh drop of sweat teared up on Kimberly’s brow and made a slow, wet path down the plane of her cheek.

“Driver, put your hands up,” Lehane ordered again. “Driver, using your left hand, lower all four windows.”

The driver’s side window finally glided down. From this angle, Kimberly could just make out the silhouette of the driver’s head as fresh daylight surrounded him in a halo. It appeared that his hands were held in the air as ordered. She eased her grip slightly on her rifle.

“Driver, using your left hand, remove the key from the ignition.”

Lehane was making the guy use his left hand, simply to work the law of averages. Most people were right-handed, so they wanted to keep that arm in sight at all times. Next, the driver would be instructed to drop the car key out the open window, then open the car door, all with his left hand. Then he would be ordered to step slowly out of the car, keeping both hands up at all times. He would slowly pivot 360 degrees so they could visually inspect his form for weapons. If he was wearing a jacket, he would be asked to hold it open so they could

see beneath his coat. Finally, he would be ordered to walk toward them with his hands on his head, turn, drop to his knees, cross his ankles and sit back on his heels. At that time, they would finally move forward and take their suspect into custody.

Unfortunately, the driver didn't seem to know the theories behind a proper felony vehicle stop. He still didn't lower his hands, but neither did he reach for the key in the ignition.

"Quincy?" Lehane's voice crackled over the radio.

"I can see the driver," Kimberly reported back, gazing through the rifle sight. "I can't make out the passenger side, however. Tinted windshield's too dark."

"Squire?"

Tom Squire had cover duty from Vehicle B, parked twenty feet to the right of Kimberly. "I think . . . I think there might be someone in the back. Again, hard to tell with the windows."

"Driver, using your left hand, remove the key from the ignition." Lehane repeated his command, his voice louder now, but still controlled. The goal was to remain patient. Make the driver come to you, do not relinquish control.

Was it Kimberly's imagination, or was the vehicle now slowly rocking up and down? Someone was moving around . . .

"Driver, this is the FBI! Remove the key from the ignition!"

"Shit, shit, shit," Alissa murmured beside Kimberly. She was sweating hard, streams of moisture pouring down her face. Leaning half out of the car, she had her Glock .40 positioned in the crack between the roof of their vehicle and the open door. Her right arm was visibly shaking, however. For the first time, Kimberly noticed that Alissa hadn't fully removed her seat belt. Half of it was still tangled around her left arm.

“Driver—”

The driver’s left hand finally moved. Alissa exhaled forcefully. And in the next instant, everything went to shit.

Kimberly saw it first. “Gun! Backseat, driver side—”

Pop, pop, pop! Red mushroomed across their front windshield. Kimberly ducked and dove out of the vehicle for the shelter of her car door. She came up fast and spread cover fire above the top of her window. More *pop, pop, pop*.

“Reloading rifle,” she yelled into the radio.

“Vince reloading handgun.”

“Taking heavy fire from the right, backseat passenger window!”

“Alissa!” Kimberly called out. “Cover us!”

Kimberly turned toward her partner, frantically cramming fresh rounds into the magazine, then realized for the first time that Alissa was no longer to be seen.

“Alissa?”

She stretched across the front seats. New Agent Alissa Sampson was now on the asphalt, a dark red stain spreading across her cheap orange suit.

“Agent down, agent down,” Kimberly cried. Another *pop*, and the asphalt exploded two inches from Alissa’s leg.

“Damn,” Alissa moaned. “Oh damn, that *hurts!*”

“Where are those rifles?” Lehane yelled.

Kimberly shot back up, saw the doors of the Mercedes were now swung open for cover and bright vivid colors were literally exploding in all directions. Oh, things had gone definitely FUBAR now.

“Rifles!” Lehane yelled again.

Kimberly hastily scrambled back to her side, and got her rifle between the crack of the car door. She was frantically trying to recall protocol. Apprehension was still the goal. But they were under heavy fire, possible loss of

agent life. Fuck it. She started firing at anything that moved near the Mercedes.

Another *pop*, her car door exploded purple and she reflexively yelped and ducked. Another *pop* and the pavement mushroomed yellow one inch from her exposed feet. Shit!

Kimberly darted up, opened fire, then dropped back behind the door.

“Quincy, rifle reloading,” she yelled into the radio, her hands shaking so badly now with adrenaline that she fumbled the release and had to do it twice. Come on, Kimberly. Breathe!

They needed to regain control of the situation. She couldn’t get the damn rounds into the magazine. Breathe, breathe, breathe. Hold it together. A movement caught the corner of her eye. The car. The black sedan, doors still open, was now rolling forward.

She grabbed her radio, dropped it, grabbed it again, and yelled, “Get the wheels, get the wheels.”

Squire and Lehané either heard her or got it on their own, because the next round of gunfire splattered the pavement and the sedan came to an awkward halt just one foot from Kimberly’s car. She looked up. Caught the startled gaze of the man in the driver’s seat. He bolted from the vehicle. She leapt out from behind her car door after him.

And a moment later, pain, brilliant and hot pink, exploded across her lower spine.

New Agent Kimberly Quincy went down. She did not get up again.

“Well, that was an exercise in stupidity,” FBI supervisor Mark Watson exclaimed fifteen minutes later. The vehicle-stop drill was over. The five new agents had returned, paint-splattered, overheated, and technically half-dead to the gathering site on Hogan’s Alley. They

now had the honor of being thoroughly dressed down in front of their thirty-eight fellow classmates. “First mistake, anyone?”

“Alissa didn’t get her seat belt off.”

“Yeah. She unfastened the clasp, but didn’t pull it back. Then when it came time for action . . .”

Alissa hung her head. “I got a little tangled, went to undo it—”

“Popped up and got shot in the shoulder. That’s why we practice. Problem number two?”

“Kimberly didn’t back up her partner.”

Watson’s eyes lit up. A former Denver cop before joining the Bureau ten years ago, this was one of his favorite topics. “Yes, Kimberly and her partner. Let’s discuss that. Kimberly, why didn’t *you* notice that Alissa hadn’t undone her seat belt?”

“I did!” Kimberly protested. “But then the car, and the guns . . . It all happened so fast.”

“Yes, it all happened so fast. Epitaph of the dead and untrained. Look—being aware of the suspect is good. Being conscious of your role is good. But you also have to be aware of what’s right beside you. Your partner overlooked something. That’s her mistake. But you didn’t catch it for her, and that was *your* mistake. Then she got hit, now you’re down a man, and that mistake is getting bigger all the time. Plus, what were you doing just leaving her there on the pavement?”

“Lehane was yelling for rifle support—”

“You left a fellow agent exposed! If she wasn’t already dead, she certainly was after that! You couldn’t drag her back into the car?”

Kimberly opened her mouth. Shut her mouth. Wished bitterly, selfishly, that Alissa could’ve taken care of herself for a change, then gave up the argument once and for all.

“Third mistake?” Watson demanded crisply.

“They never controlled the car,” another classmate offered up.

“Exactly. You stopped the suspect’s car, but never controlled it.” His gaze went to Lebane. “When things first went wrong, what should you have done?”

Lebane visibly squirmed. He fingered the collar of his brown leisure suit, cut two sizes too big and now bearing hot-pink and mustard-yellow paint on the left shoulder. The paint guns used by the actors in the drills—aka the bad guys—stained everything in sight, hence their Salvation Army wardrobe. The exploding shells also hurt like the dickens, which was why Lebane was holding his left arm protectively against his ribs. For the record, the FBI Academy trainees weren’t allowed paint guns but used their real weapons loaded with blanks. The official explanation was that their instructors wanted the trainees to get a feel for their firearms. Likewise, they all wore vests to get used to the weight of body armor. That all sounded well and good, but why not have the actors shoot blanks as well?

The students had their theories. The brightly exploding paint shells made getting hit all the more embarrassing. And the pain wasn’t something you forgot about anytime soon. As Steven, the class psychologist, dryly pointed out, the Hogan Alley live-action drills were basically classic shock therapy on a whole new scale.

“Shot out the tires,” Lebane said now.

“Yes, at least Kimberly eventually thought of that. Which brings us to the Deadly Deed of the Day.”

Watson’s gaze swung to Kimberly. She met his look, knew what it meant, and stuck her chin up.

“She abandoned the cover of her vehicle,” the first person said.

“Put down her weapon.”

“Went after one suspect before she finished securing the scene.”

“Stopped providing cover fire—”

“Got killed—”

“Maybe she missed her partner.”

Laughter. Kimberly shot the commentator a thanks-for-nothing glare. Whistler, a big burly former Marine—who sounded like he was whistling every time he breathed—smiled back. He’d won Deadly Deed of the Day yesterday when, during a bank robbery of the Bank of Hogan, he went to shoot a robber and hit the teller instead.

“I got a little lost in the moment,” Kimberly said curtly.

“You got killed,” Watson corrected flatly.

“Merely paralyzed!”

That earned her another droll look. “Secure the vehicle first. Control the situation. Then give pursuit.”

“He’d be gone—”

“But you would have the car, which is evidence, you’d have his cohorts to flip on him, and best of all, you’d still be alive. A bird in the hand, Kimberly. A bird in the hand.” Watson gave her one last stern look, then opened up his lecture to the rest of the class. “Remember, people, in the heat of the moment, you have to stay in control. That means falling back on your training and the endless drills we’re making you do here. Hogan’s Alley is about learning good judgment. Taking the high-risk shot in the middle of a bank holdup is not good judgment.” Whistler got a look. “And leaving the cover of your vehicle, and your fellow agents, to pursue one suspect on foot is not good judgment.” A fresh glance at Kimberly. Like she needed it.

“Remember your training. Be smart. Stay controlled. That will keep you alive.” He glanced at his watch, then clapped his hands. “All right, people, five o’clock, that’s a wrap. For God’s sake, go wash all that paint off. And remember, folks—as long as it remains this hot, drink plenty of water.”