



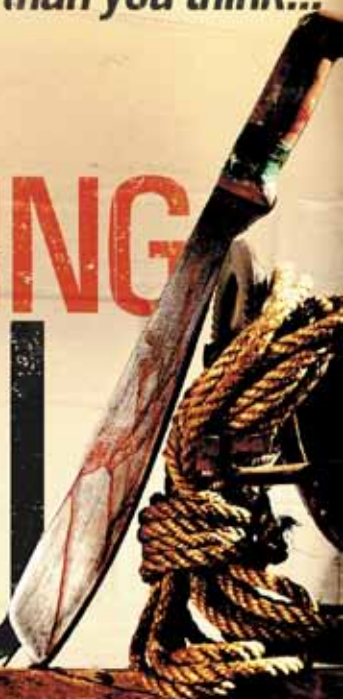
MARY
BURTON

I'M

He's *closer*
than you think...

WATCHING

YOU



I'm Watching You
by
Mary Burton

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Chapter One

*Richmond, Virginia,
Monday, July 7, 4:10 A.M.*

Thou shalt not kill.

The shadowed figure squatted in the darkness by Harold Turner's lifeless body, amazed that excitement, not shame, surged.

The sense of power and righteousness was nearly overwhelming. God's calling to be the Guardian had never been clearer.

Placing the .45-caliber handgun and silencer into a black duffle bag, the Guardian eyed Harold's body, propped against dented metal trashcans.

Even in death, Turner appeared pompous. Arrogant.

A neat part divided Harold's thinning black hair. Manicured nails glistened in the moonlight. His double-breasted suit and white shirt still looked crisp, and his yellow silk tie matched the handkerchief packed in his breast pocket. Gold monogrammed cuff links told anyone worth knowing that Harold had money and taste.

But beneath the expensive suit that Harold always wore were track marks on his arms and behind his knees. It was an open secret that Harold had been a drug addict for years.

The Guardian adjusted Harold's tie over the growing plume of blood staining the attorney's shirt. Countless hours had been spent planning this first murder, strategizing and worrying to near exhaustion. And in the end, luring Harold here had required only the promise of drugs. Firing the bullet from the .45 into his chest had been effortless.

'A fitting place, don't you think? I mean, a battered women's shelter. Your wife certainly would understand why I chose this place.'

The shelter behind them was housed in a white Colonial, and it blended so seamlessly into the middle-class subdivision that most neighbors didn't know the home's true purpose. Soft moonlight washed over the shelter's grassy backyard. A six-foot privacy fence corralled assorted kick balls, bicycles, and rusted wagons – all donated toys used by the children staying at the shelter. There was a swing with a long yellow slide surrounded by mulch.

Thoughts of the children stirred anger in the Guardian. 'There shouldn't be places like this. It's not right. Children should feel safe in their own home.'

The Guardian leveled an accusing gaze on Harold. The high-and-mighty attorney had stood up in federal court this morning to defend his drug dealer client, speaking with authority, visibly comfortable with his ability to manipulate 'reasonable doubt.'

The Harold Turner who had appeared in the county courtroom was a far cry from the man who'd stood here just minutes ago with tears running down his face begging for his life. *That* Harold had never understood a fear so sharp it burned.

But *this* Harold had.

This Harold had dropped to his knees. He'd offered money and promised lavish favors – anything to buy back his miserable life.

'But fancy appeals don't work on me, do they Harold?' the Guardian had said. 'There is no redemption for you.'

A slight breeze rustled through the thick canopy of leaves above. Soon the sun would rise and with it the heat. This had been one of the hottest Julys on record and the heat was drying up yards, draining water tables, and straining tempers.

In the distance a dog barked. A cat screeched. They ran through the dark yards, their sounds vanishing in the night.

The Guardian stared up at the shelter, searching for any sign that the animals had awoken anyone. A light on the second floor came on but it just as quickly went dark. In the last hour of the night, the people in the shelter and the neighborhood slept.

This was a sacred and blessed time. Predawn's quiet and peace conjured feelings of invincibility and invulnerability.

The Guardian unfastened the gold cuff link on Harold's left wrist and carefully tucked it in the attorney's pocket before neatly pushing the shirt and jacket sleeves up to his elbow. A platinum wedding band squeezed the ring finger on Harold's left hand.

'His power is great, and He never lets the guilty go unpunished.' The Bible verse had given the Guardian comfort during the darkest days after Debra's death. Sweet, sweet Debra, dead at thirty-nine, her life stolen by

her own husband. Like Harold, Debra's husband had been a respected man in the community, but a violent man at home. His tyranny had trapped Debra and her daughter in hell for years.

Memories of Debra and her child brought sadness and regret. Debra had cried out for help. She'd wanted out of her marriage. She'd wanted a fresh start. But no one had come to her rescue. No one had cared what happened behind the closed doors of her house.

And then Debra's husband had killed her. He'd violently beaten her to death and then, like the coward he was, had retreated and killed himself. Debra's only child had found her mother. The violence of that day had left its mark on the girl and she'd run away.

Many a night the Guardian had dreamed about Debra and her child and prayed for their forgiveness.

Twelve years had passed. And then the sign from God came a few months ago. The sign was an article in a magazine. It was so clean and pure and it made the Guardian weep. There had been no question then that the time for revenge had come.

Debra was gone forever, as was her child's lost innocence, but those who hurt their families could be rooted out and severely punished. They could be made to pay for their sins against their families.

The Guardian removed a machete from the black duffle bag and raised the blade high overhead. The edge was razor sharp, finely honed on a whetstone until the blade could slice paper.

Moonlight glinted off the blade before it came down in

one slicing blow that severed the flesh and bone of Harold's left hand.

Blood splattered onto Harold's face and shirt as well as the Guardian's jumpsuit and gloved hands. The blood looked brown in the moonlight as it oozed from the stump and pooled in the dry earth around Harold's body.

Primal energy surged through the Guardian. For a moment, life had never felt sweeter.

Retribution is mine.

After wrapping the hand in a plastic zip-top bag, the Guardian shoved it into the duffle bag along with the machete, still dripping with blood.

Satisfied that no one had seen, the Guardian zipped the duffle bag closed and then jogged across the backyard, slipped through the privacy fence gate, and sprinted to the waiting van parked halfway down the block.

Opening the van's front door tripped the dome light. Blinking against the brightness, the Guardian quickly got in and closed the door. Darkness shrouded the cab once again. For several seconds, the Guardian sat in the darkness scanning the homes around to make sure no one had seen. The homes remained dark.

Finally, satisfied that no one would intrude, the Guardian shifted his attention to the open flower box on the passenger seat. The box was filled with purple irises. Each individual stem had been capped with a vial of water to preserve freshness.

After removing Harold's hand from the canvas duffle bag, the Guardian reverently wrapped it in green tissue and nestled it under the flowers.

The choice of irises was inspired. She would understand their meaning.

Friendship. Hope. Wisdom. Valor.

After replacing the lid back on the flower box, the Guardian tied the red silk ribbon around it into a precise bow, removed a prewritten card from the glove box and slipped it under the knot.

The Guardian switched on the ignition. The dashboard light washed over the box and the thick, bold handwriting on the card.

It read, *'For Lindsay.'*

Chapter Two

Monday, July 7, 8:10 A.M.

Lindsay O'Neil was late for work. Desperately late. She was running so far behind because a power outage had silenced her alarm clock and she'd overslept by almost three hours.

She glanced down at her Jeep's speedometer. It hovered just above thirty miles per hour, but she'd gladly have doubled that speed if Broad Street's four lanes of west-bound traffic hadn't been so clogged with commuters.

Tension squeezed her chest. Normally, it took fifteen minutes for her to make the ten-mile trek from her apartment to the women's shelter where she worked. But normally, she didn't sleep as soundly as she had last night. Most nights dreams woke her frequently and she had no trouble rising early and leaving by five A.M.

Lindsay turned on the radio. She punched the 'scan' button several times before finally settling on a song she liked. The music and lyrics calmed her and enabled her to take a few deep breaths. Some of the tension released from her body.

For the last year and a half, Lindsay had worked as the director of Sanctuary Women's Shelter. Her schedule was always jam-packed with counseling sessions and

administrative meetings, and most days she barely had time to eat.

And today's schedule was going to be busier than most. In the last two and a half hours, Lindsay had missed the seven A.M. group-counseling session that she held each Monday. The meeting was mandatory for all shelter residents. She'd also missed an eight A.M. conference call with the chairman of the shelter's board of directors, Dana Miller, who expected weekly updates.

Missing the teleconference was a problem, but she could talk her way out of it. However, sleeping through the group session with her residents was inexcusable. The women who attended that meeting were all in abusive relationships. Many hadn't worked in years, and most were more afraid of the unknown that lay ahead than they'd been when they'd lived with the threat of physical violence. Often Lindsay did little more than listen, dispense tissues, and offer hugs. What was important was that she was always there to bolster them up – *no matter what*.

And today she'd let them all down.

She flipped open her cell phone. She'd rushed out so quickly this morning, she'd not thought to call the office. However, the phone's screen was blank. The battery was dead. Hadn't she set it on the charger? 'The power outage. Damn it.'

Lindsay stopped for a red light and tossed the phone onto the passenger seat. Heat spiraled up from the road's black asphalt. Even though she had the air-conditioning on full blast, the heat rose up through the floorboards.

The Jeep's engine fan came on and within seconds the motor hesitated and threatened to cut off.

'Damn it,' she muttered.

She'd been promising herself for months to take the Jeep in for a tune-up but kept putting it off. There never seemed to be enough time. Now the engine balked in the high temperature. She shut off the air conditioner and rolled down the window. Thick, heavy July air rushed into the car.

Without the strain of the air conditioner, the engine settled down.

She started to perspire.

'God, I hate the heat.'

It coiled around her. It made her temper rise. It made her remember. . . .

'Mom,' she whispered, closing her eyes.

Twelve years ago a seventeen-year-old Lindsay had come home early from her lifeguard job on a hot, stormy afternoon. Usually, she worked until closing time, past nine in the evening. But on that hot day, thunderstorms had sent streaks of lightning across the cloudy sky. The manager had closed the pool around two and had sent the lifeguards home.

Her lifeguard buddy from the club, Joel, had given her a ride home. 'Hey, are you sure you don't want to catch a movie?' Joel was a skinny kid with blotchy skin and braces. 'It's my treat.'

She knew Joel had a crush on her and she didn't want to hurt his feelings. 'Thanks, but I don't get a chance to spend much time with my mom. But I promise we'll go next week?'

‘It’s a date.’ He dropped her off at the top of the circular drive in front of the green framed house built almost a hundred years ago by her great-grandparents.

Lindsay waved and with her pool bag dashed past her mother’s prized flower beds filled with daylilies, begonias, and marigolds. The front screen door wasn’t locked, which bothered her. She’d warned her mother about keeping the door locked.

Her mother had forced her father out two months earlier, because she could no longer endure the verbal and physical abuse. Since his departure, the house had taken on a lighter air. Her mother had begun singing again and she’d taken to wearing makeup. Now Lindsay no longer searched for excuses not to come home. In fact, she looked forward to it.

Lindsay dropped her pool bag by the front door and checked her watch. Her mother’s waitress shift at the Ashland Town Restaurant wouldn’t start for a few more hours so it gave them time to hang out together.

Thunder boomed and shook the windowpanes in the house. Dark clouds hovered over the corn fields and the distant trees. Gusty breezes inverted the oak tree leaves, making the tree line look more silver than green. The storm was heading east fast and soon it would be all around them.

‘Mom?’

No answer.

From the kitchen, the radio crooned *California Dreamin’* by The Mamas & the Papas. It was her mother’s favorite song. Lindsay smiled, recalling how the two of them had

danced to the tune just a few weeks ago. Her mother dreamed of going to California, of seeing the Pacific Ocean and visiting Universal Studios in Hollywood. Lindsay had promised to drive her mother cross country next summer right after she graduated from high school. For fun, they spent their spare time mapping the route west.

‘Mom!’

The song’s chorus repeated the verse about churches, kneeling and pretending to pray.

Lindsay started to hum and grabbed a soda from the refrigerator, popping it open.

That’s when Lindsay spotted her father’s worn work gloves on the kitchen table. Suddenly, her stomach churned. What was her father doing here?

He’d called her mother once or twice in the last couple of weeks. The calls had worried Lindsay, but when she had questioned her mother about them, her mother had downplayed everything and told her not to fret.

Everything looked as it should. The linoleum floor was swept clean. Dishes drained in the strainer. White lace curtains fluttered in the window. The Formica-topped table had two place settings arranged across from each other. Her father could be charming when he wanted to be and most likely had convinced her mother to fix him lunch.

Now a stir of cold air brushed the back of Lindsay’s neck. The house suddenly felt different. Wrong. Apprehension squeezed her heart.

Lindsay glanced around. ‘Mom!’

She crossed the kitchen, pushed the back screened door

open, and glanced at the swing and glider by the toolshed in the backyard. Dark clouds covered the horizon.

‘Mom, where are —’

Lindsay turned to the right side of the yard. She stopped abruptly. Her mother lay on her back near the trash cans by the fence.

She rushed toward her mother and stopped just inches from her. Her mother’s face was so beaten, so swollen, it was nearly unrecognizable. Blood pooled around her head. Beside her body lay a bloody hammer that looked as if it had been hurriedly discarded.

Dropping to her mother’s side, Lindsay reached out to her mother but hesitated. She was afraid to touch her.

Afraid to touch the woman who’d loved her, cared for her, and refused to abandon her no matter what.

A honking horn wrenched Lindsay from the memory and brought her back to the present. She glanced up at the green light. Sweat beaded on her forehead. Her hands trembled. Cursing, she punched the gas.

Twelve years and her hands still trembled when she remembered that day. Twelve years and she still had nightmares. Twelve years and she felt that if she didn’t have a white-knuckle grip on her life it would all slip away.

‘Stop it, Lindsay,’ she muttered. ‘It’s long over. *Done.*’

Purposefully, she shifted her mind from the past to her to-do list that she made certain never ended. The first thing she needed to do was call her boss Dana and apologize for missing their conference call. The second must-do job was to write the summation for the grant application, which, if they won, would pay the salary for a full-time

counselor. Then there were the fund-raiser ideas, the notes for her talk to a local church group tonight, and the hospital intervention awareness seminar. . . .

A therapist had once called Lindsay's jam-packed schedule an avoidance device. He'd said it was easier for her to stay busy than to think about her losses. Lindsay hadn't argued, because she knew he was right. But she didn't know how to slow down and keep the dark thoughts at bay.

When she turned into the quiet residential neighborhood where Sanctuary was located, she slowed to the twenty-five-mile-per-hour speed limit. She was so far behind schedule today that she'd be working late into the night just to break even.

She downshifted to first gear when she spotted the two police cars and the unmarked Impala parked in front of the shelter.

Her fingers tightened on the steering wheel and tension nearly choked her breath away. 'Oh, God, what's happened now?'

The last time the cops had been to the shelter's secret location, one of the residents, Pam Rogers, had broken strict protocol and called her abusive husband. Pam had divulged the shelter's location and asked him to come get her. He'd arrived fifteen minutes later. She'd run out to him, begging him to take her back. Instead of welcoming her, he'd hit her and then ordered her into his car. When the hysterical overnight volunteer had called Lindsay at home, Lindsay had immediately contacted the one brother Pam had mentioned. He didn't know where his sister was so Lindsay had called in favors hoping to find Pam.

The woman was found dead the next day behind a convenience store. She'd been badly beaten and strangled. The cops had tracked down the husband two weeks later and arrested him. Jack Rogers had shown no remorse but had talked about his rights as a husband.

His rights. What about his wife's right to live a life free of fear?

Lindsay pulled her Jeep into the paved driveway. She jerked the parking brake up, grabbed her satchel purse, and hurried up the concrete sidewalk to the glass front door.

Sanctuary was on a corner lot and wasn't distinguished by signage but by a wide front porch furnished with weathered white rockers. A collection of planters that Lindsay had filled with red geraniums over the Fourth of July weekend added a splash of color. The yard was neatly cut and edged and the beds had been freshly mulched. It had been her experience that people in the neighborhood didn't pay much attention to those who kept their yards in good shape. And going unnoticed was vital to Sanctuary's success.

The shelter's first floor had four main rooms that were divided by a center hallway. The first room on the right didn't serve as a living room but her office. It was closed off by french doors and filled with stacks of files, manuals, and sacks of unsorted donations.

A conference room, a dining room in a conventional home, adjoined her office. In its core there was a circle of chairs that reminded her of the counseling meeting she'd missed that morning. The walls were decorated with posters that denounced domestic violence.

Across the hallway was a den furnished with a large television, a couple of secondhand couches covered with white sheets, and huge throw pillows on the floor. At the back of the house was a kitchen she'd painted yellow last month. Upstairs there were five rooms, each having two sets of twin beds. Often women moved here with their children and she tried to put the entire family in one room together. She even had a couple of cribs and a bassinet.

The house was normally teeming with the women and their children who made Sanctuary their temporary home. The chatter of women and children often mingled with the TV and ringing phone.

But now, the place was silent and it appeared deserted.

Silver bracelets jangled on Lindsay's slim wrist as she pulled the rubber band from her blond hair and released the too tight ponytail that was already giving her a headache. Blunt, straight hair fell around her shoulders.

Lindsay started toward the kitchen, unable to suppress the growing panic as she searched for last night's volunteer. 'Ruby!'

A heavysset black woman rushed out of the kitchen, a phone in hand. Ruby Dillon, when she wasn't working at the nursing home as an aid, volunteered nights at the shelter. About fifty, Ruby was a big woman who wore her hair short and her pants and shirts oversized. Her dead-on honesty about her own past mistakes, including time in prison and drug use, had earned the residents' respect.

'It's about time you got here. I've been calling you for an hour,' Ruby said, shaking the phone at her.

'My power went out last night. The house phones didn't

work and my cell phone didn't charge. What's with the police? What's going on?'

'They came because of the body.'

Images of her mother lying dead in her backyard flashed in her mind. 'Body? Please tell me it wasn't one of ours.'

Ruby touched Lindsay gently on the arm. 'No, no, honey. It wasn't one of our residents. All our people are off to work or school.'

Relieved, Lindsay closed her eyes. She had to choke back a sudden rush of tears. 'Who?'

Ruby shrugged. 'I don't know. But the body is male. I found him when I was taking out the garbage this morning. He was propped up against the trash cans behind the toolshed, his suit buttoned up and his hair combed as if he were headed to Sunday church.'

Lindsay moved down the hallway into the kitchen and looked out the window over the sink. The backyard was filled with a half dozen cops gathered at the yellow tape. Most were uniformed but in the center stood a plain-clothes detective. His back was to her.

The cops blocked Lindsay's view of the corpse. 'Did you recognize him?'

Ruby folded her arms over her chest. 'Who? The dead guy? No, ma'am. And I didn't look in his face either. The devil can steal your soul if you look the dead in the face.'

Lindsay dropped her purse on a well-worn kitchen table that was covered with nicks and flecks of paint from a child's weekend craft project. 'I've seen my share of death. Maybe the devil has stolen my soul.'

‘Don’t even kid about that.’

‘Do the police know who the dead guy is?’

‘If they do, they’re not telling me. A detective just arrived minutes ago. I told him everything I know, but he was pretty tight-lipped when I asked questions. He’s the one who said to stop what I was doing and track you down.’ Ruby’s sharp gaze traveled over Lindsay. ‘Are those the clothes you wore yesterday?’

Lindsay glanced down at the faded jeans and pink cotton top. She smoothed a wrinkle from her shirt. ‘Yes.’

Ruby cocked a dark eyebrow. ‘Where have you been? Lord, I hope you’ve been with a man.’

The idea made Lindsay blush. ‘Nope.’

‘Too bad. You certainly could use a man in your bed. That no-account husband of yours hasn’t paid you any attention this last year.’

‘We’re separated, remember?’

‘No man in his right mind would leave you.’

Lindsay was unwilling to get into another discussion about her failed marriage or her monastic, workaholic life. ‘I taught a yoga class yesterday afternoon and then went home to work on this grant. I fell asleep in my clothes on the couch. The power went out sometime last night and the alarm didn’t go off.’ If not for her roommate, Nicole, who’d been awakened by a barking dog, she could have slept a couple more hours.

Ruby grunted. ‘Well, if you ain’t got a man, I’m glad you at least got a good night’s sleep. You work too hard. You’re burning the candle at both ends, if you ask me.’

This last year, since she’d separated from her husband,

she had stayed particularly busy, even by her own standards. ‘You’ll be glad to know that I slept like the dead.’

Ruby grimaced and glanced toward the heavens. ‘Don’t be making fun of the dead. The devil will come and get you.’

Lindsay pushed her hand through her hair. ‘Sorry. Morbid jokes are a holdover from having lived with a cop.’

Ruby frowned. ‘Your husband is a cop?’

‘Yeah.’ This was another topic she did not want to explore. ‘I’m going to talk to the police. I want to get those squad cars away from my house before everyone figures out we’re a shelter.’

Ruby’s heavy feet trailed behind Lindsay. ‘Don’t waste your breath. I tried a couple of times to talk to that “detective.”’ The word *detective* sounded like an expletive. ‘He said to stay out of his crime scene. He even locked the back door and pocketed the key from the deadbolt so no one would go in or out that door.’

That ticked Lindsay off. Sanctuary was her creation. ‘This cop is on my turf now and he is going to tell *me* what’s going on?’

Grinning, Ruby shook her head. ‘Sometimes I think you’d rather fight than eat.’

She smiled. ‘Somebody’s got to lead the charge.’

Ruby snorted. ‘Honey, you’ve got too many causes. About time someone worried about you.’

‘I’m better off taking care of myself.’ She’d said those words so often in the last year that she almost believed them.

Lindsay headed out the front door and went around

the side of the house to the loose slats in the privacy fence. She bent the slats back and slipped through unnoticed.

The closest cop to her was a patrolman. He stood at the lip of the yellow tape and faced the crime scene, his back to her. He was slender, a little gawky, and appeared fresh out of the academy. He couldn't have been much more than twenty-one.

A humid breeze tunneled through the backyard's still, hot air and carried with it a host of smells. Blood. Waste. Gunpowder. Death.

From this angle she couldn't see the body beyond the circle of six cops who stood around it.

She approached the uniformed cop. She cleared her throat. 'Do you know anything about the victim?'

The young cop whirled around and glared down at her. 'Where'd you come from?'

'That house.' She crooked her head toward Sanctuary and then nodded to the crowd of cops. 'Do you know who was murdered? I hear it was a man.'

The young cop started to answer, then caught himself. He puffed out his chest. 'Ma'am, this is a police crime scene. You are not supposed to be here.'

His attempt to intimidate her barely registered on her radar. She'd stared down far scarier people than this kid. 'Look, Officer . . .' She glanced down at the bronze name badge on his chest. 'Bennett. That house is Sanctuary Women's Shelter and I'm the director.'

'I don't care who you are. You can't be here.'

Her tone had sounded brittle and she was reminded of Ruby's frequent advice to soften her delivery. She

remembered something about catching more flies with honey than vinegar.

With a conscious effort, she smiled and relaxed her stance. ‘I really need to know who was killed in case it involves one of the women staying here. It’s my job to keep them safe.’

The cop’s frown deepened. ‘Even if I knew, I couldn’t tell you.’

His attitude annoyed but didn’t deter her. ‘How’d the guy die?’

‘I can’t say.’

‘Do you know the time of death?’ She edged around the cop. If she got a little closer she might find out more about the victim.

He shifted and blocked her path. ‘No one gets in that crime scene.’

She leaned around him. Even from this angle, most of the crime scene remained blocked by the broad shoulders of the detective, who had now removed his suit jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and donned rubber gloves and booties. She couldn’t see his face but noted his military short black hair and crisp white shirt. His hands rested on his narrow hips.

He must be the bossy detective Ruby had mentioned. Lindsay summed him up in a nanosecond: an alpha male, a by-the-book tight-ass, and a bully.

She suddenly felt very weary. She’d been dealing with bullies far too long. But if he was the one she needed to talk to, then so be it.

Reading her thoughts, the officer said, ‘The detective in charge is going to talk to you when he’s ready.’

She pushed her hand through her hair. ‘This detective got a name?’

‘Detective Kier.’

She swallowed. ‘Zack Kier?’

A smug smile lifted the edge of the officer’s lip. ‘That’s right.’

Zack Kier was her estranged husband. They’d not spoken in almost a year.

She glanced toward the plainclothes detective again. Since when had Zack moved from undercover narcotics to homicide? When had he cut his hair, shaved the beard, and taken to wearing suits? Her Zack had worn his thick, long hair tied at the nape of his neck. He had preferred faded jeans, T-shirts, worn boots and a well-worn black leather jacket.

Everything about him had changed in the last year. And nothing had changed.

She should have recognized the rigid, controlled stance, which had always announced his unwavering commitment to police work. He also still tapped his index finger against his belt buckle when his hands rested on his hips.

Raw emotions she’d struggled to bury this last year enveloped her in a rush. Love. Hate. Fear. Betrayal. All ripped through her and for a moment left her speechless.

Lindsay’s knee-jerk reaction was to retreat. She’d have preferred avoiding this meeting with Zack and sidestep the messy tangle of emotions that were sure to follow.

Then she caught herself. Her therapist had pointed out that she had a habit of running from emotions that were personally painful. He had told her she had to learn to face

her feelings for Zack. When she'd expressed her doubts, he'd reminded her that she'd risen above her father's brutality and her mother's death. Zack and their marriage should be no exception.

Still, Lindsay had to swallow before she could shout, 'Zack!'

All the other cops turned first and stared at her while Zack's body stiffened. For a moment he seemed frozen, but then he turned slowly and stared at her from behind aviator sunglasses.

Instinct screamed *run*. She stood her ground.

The sunglasses hid Zack's sharp blue eyes, but she knew even without the shades his expression would have been unreadable. He'd always been so good at hiding his emotions. It's why he'd made a great undercover cop and a lousy husband.

'Zack, can you tell me who the body is?' Her voice sounded surprisingly controlled – a minor, but appreciated miracle.

For a moment, Zack tensed and she expected him to walk toward her. Their relationship was unconventional and damaged, but they had a history and that had to be worth something.

He drew in a breath but didn't move toward her. 'I'm not ready to interview you yet, Lindsay. Go back inside and wait for me.'

Zack sounded so controlled. So together. He'd anticipated seeing her.

That realization angered her. He could have given her a heads-up and called her on her cell. *Crap*. She remem-

bered her cell was dead and so was her home phone. Maybe he had tried to call.

Still, the insight didn't soften the sharp emotions digging at her. 'Well, I'd like to talk to you now, detective.' She'd laced the words with attitude, knowing he'd hate it.

Zack's left hand flexed. She recognized the gesture. It signaled he was irritated. Good.

Speaking to the young cop, Zack said, 'Officer Bennett, escort Ms O'Neil away from my crime scene now.'

The curt dismissal had her squaring her shoulders. 'This is shelter property, Detective Kier. You can't shut me out. Whoever was killed on my property affects my residents.'

Zack didn't answer. Instead, he turned back toward the body.

Honey not vinegar. Honey not vinegar.

With effort, Lindsay drew in a breath and softened her tone. 'Look, Zack, my assistant found the body and it's in our backyard. Can't you give me any information?'

'Not now, Lindsay,' Zack said. He crouched by the body, pulled off his sunglasses, and chewed the earpiece as he stared at the body.

Barely a few moments together and already it was clear that the emotional wall between them was as thick as it had been a year ago. It was hard now to believe that they'd ever been close.

Lindsay always felt most alone when she tried to connect with him and he shut her out. 'Detective, can you at least move the marked police cars?' she asked. 'Sanctuary doesn't need any more bad publicity.'

He didn't respond.

Officer Bennett took Lindsay's arm. 'Ma'am, you need to leave this area.'

She snatched her arm free. 'Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm going.'