

### Chapter Twenty-Two

Awakened from restless sleep by a rattling at her ground floor bedroom window, Connie Raymond fumbled with the bedside lamp, lighting it just before it fell to the carpeted floor. The outside clatter ceased, then reappeared from a more distant location. She rose, momentarily tripping on the lamp cord as she ran to the night stand on her husband's side of the bed, in search of his old, thirty-eight caliber revolver. Papers flew everywhere until, finally, her fingers came in contact with the gun's carved butt. With the revolver undulating in her trembling hand, she listened intently to the scraping sound that had replaced the rattle; she froze in the bedroom doorway. "Who's there," she shouted, nervously, "I've got a gun!" Leaning against the doorjamb, her nakedness silhouetted by a short, sheer

nightgown, she pointed the weapon forward in a two handed grip. Momentarily immobilized, she thought to herself, should I check the doors and windows or ... what am I thinking? Locking the bedroom door, she reached for the phone that now sat precariously perched on the nightstand and, quietly lifting the receiver, dialed the police. In her haste, she hadn't noticed the absence of a dial tone and that revelation served only to heighten her fear. She dropped the phone on the bed as the mental image of her cell phone sitting on the kitchen counter came into view. "Oh shit," she hissed, "they cut the line and the cell phone's out there! But, the security system has its own. Let's hope it's working!"

She quickly inspected the bedroom alarm panel and noting that it was still armed, realized that it hadn't been tripped. Well, I'll take care of that, she mused, as she flung open the nearest window, unleashing an earsplitting siren. She remained behind the perceived safety of the locked door until the familiar flashing red and blue lights signaled the arrival of the police. Grabbing the thick, white terry robe that she had left draped over a chair, she cautiously made her way to the front entrance and unlocked it.

"Are you the homeowner?" the uniformed officer asked.

"Yes, I'm Constance Raymond."

"Are you OK?"

"Yes, but I'm frightened."

"You know how to use that thing?" the officer asked, while gesturing towards the revolver that dangled from her hand.

"Yeah, my brother was a cop."

"You mind putting it down for now?"

"Oh, sorry," she said, while placing it on a table.

"Can you tell me what happened?"

"I was awakened from sleep by a noise. It sounded like someone was trying to open my window."

"Well, my partner is still checking but I didn't see any evidence for an attempted entry."

"Nothing?"

"Well, there were a few fresh footprints near your flower bed. Maybe the siren scared them away."

"Thanks for getting here so quickly."

"We respect your husband, ma'am, he's on our priority list," the officer remarked, as he looked about as if surveying the room.

"Well, how do you know they won't come back?" she asked, as she took a seat and sat huddled in the corner of the couch.

"I don't think they'll return," he said, his gaze fixed on her ample cleavage, "probably just kids looking for an easy target."

"That doesn't make me feel very comfortable, especially since I'm here all alone."

"Where's the senator, ma'am?"

"He's in Los Angeles on official business, or so he says," she replied, with a tinge of bitterness.

"Lock up, ma'am," he said, as he turned to leave, "and don't forget to reset the alarm."

"I won't but I'm still scared."

"If it'll make you feel better," he said, with a wink, "I'll pass by a few times until daybreak, just to make sure things are OK."

Her fear subsiding, Connie quickly assessed the man before her as the first sign of a familiar tingle began to emerge and then, caught herself. "Thank you, officer," she replied, "I'd appreciate that."

Unable to return to the bedroom, she walked to the kitchen, brewed a pot of strong, green tea and carried a cup to the living room couch. While fixating on the ground and sipping the scalding liquid, she noticed a path of muddy footprints on the hard wood floor. "How much time would it have taken for them to wipe their shoes?" she whispered, as she rose and attempted to wipe away the stains with her bare feet. As she continued to follow the footprints, something caught her eye. What's this? she wondered, while bending to retrieve a brightly colored envelope from where it lie, half hidden, beneath an oriental rug. Returning to the couch, she reached for the still hot cup of tea, took a sip and carefully broke the seal. "Oh my God!" she shouted, while staring at the single sheet of white paper upon

which were glued various words that had been cut from a newspaper. The message said:

*This was just a warning. Next time there will be none.*

Shuddering, she threw the paper to the ground, as if holding it could prove fatal, and ran to the kitchen telephone to call the police. "That's funny, it's working," she whispered, after recalling that only moments earlier it had been out of service. As she stood by the wall phone, trying to make sense of the frightening message and the now operative telephone, she changed her mind and punched in the number of her husband's cell phone.

"This had better be important," he growled, when he finally answered.

"John, it's me ..."

"For Pete's sake, Connie," he interrupted, "it's two o'clock in the morning."

"Something terrible has happened."

"What?"

"Come home, I need you."

"Calm down and tell me what's happened."

"Somebody tried to break into the house. The police were here and ..."

"Are you OK?"

"No, I'm frightened and I want you to come home."

"What did the police say?"

"They thought that it was kids and said that they saw no sign of entry but ..."

"They're probably right," he interrupted, "just turn on the alarm and go back to sleep."

"Are you serious, go back to sleep?"

"What else is there to do?"

"I'm frightened, I need you."

"Look, you're safe and nobody got in, right?"

"I'm not sure."

"What does that mean?"

"After the police left, I found a scary note in the living room."

"A note? What kind of note?"

In between sobs, she recited the contents of the note.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"Hmm."

"John, are you still there?"

"Yes, hon, I'm thinking."

"About what?"

"Listen, your friend Diane, why don't you call her and see if you can spend a few days at her place, just to play it safe?"

"Safe from what? What is it you're hiding from me?"

"Nothing, but if someone had the ability to slip a note into our house without our knowledge, I think we should take precautions."

"Why don't you just come home like a concerned husband should?" she shouted.

"I'm in the middle of an important session, I can't leave right now."

"I get it," she said with a sneer, "what's her name?"

"Aw jeez, you know better than that!"

"Do I? When was the last time we made love?"

"Listen, this isn't the time or place for us to be discussing our sex life."

"Don't you care about me at all?"

"Of course I do. Look, I'm going to call the FBI when we hang up. I'm certain that they will arrange for around-the-clock surveillance."

"There's something that you're not telling me, isn't there?" Connie asked, with anger dripping from her every word.

"It doesn't concern you."

"You bastard!" she shouted and slammed the phone back into its cradle.