

### Chapter Fifty-Six

Wednesday was Senator Raymond's first day back in the office since his wife's funeral. Sitting at his desk, he glared at the neatly piled stack of documents awaiting his attention. She died for this? he said to himself, trying to help people I don't even know? I've never felt so hollow and empty. Connie's framed photo caught his attention. It had always occupied a position of prominence on his desk and even though she had filed for divorce, he had refused to remove it, hoping that he could somehow change her mind. He lifted the silver frame and grasping it with both hands, swiveled in his chair to face the window. "I'm so sorry," he whispered, his tear filled eyes clouding all vision, "I'm so sorry." He remained slouched in the chair, staring off into the

empty sky, a fleeting notion of suicide whisked away by the buzzing intercom.

"Senator?" Tammy called.

He dried his eyes with a tissue, lovingly replaced the photo on his desk and pressed the talk button. "Yes?" he replied.

"Did you call me?" she asked.

"No, but now that I have your attention, I can't do this today."

"Can I get you anything?"

"No, I'm going out for lunch and then home. If you need me try me there or on my cell phone."

"Are you going back to the efficiency apartment, sir?"

No, Tammy, the home I shared with my wife."

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At six o'clock in the evening, he awakened from a deep sleep to find himself stretched out on the living room couch. He rose and headed for the bathroom, passing the front door on the way. Hmm, he thought to himself, while bending to retrieve a mass of envelopes, I must have been dead to the world, I didn't even hear the mailman when he dumped this pile through the slot. He quickly sorted through the stack of mostly bills until something odd caught his attention. A thick red envelope stood out from the bundle. Strange, he remarked to himself, while turning it from side to side, there is no return address, postmark or stamp--

it must have been hand delivered. He equivocated for several minutes, trying to decide whether he should risk opening it and then, despite previous security warnings to the contrary, made a decision. He carried the envelop to the kitchen and donned a pair of rubber dish washing gloves. While suspending the envelope over the sink, he slit one side and gently tapped the other while holding his breath. Well, no strange white powder but what kind of cruel stunt is this? he asked himself, as a pair of thong panties fell into the sink along with a typewritten note. He briefly examined the undergarment, then tossed it aside while reading the note.

*I know who killed your wife and it ain't who you think! To prove this ain't no trick, I sent somethin' of hers. If you're interested in hearin' what I have to say, meet me at nine P.M. tonight, at ...*

*P.S. Come alone. Don't bring no cops or you'll never know the truth.*

I guess that this is when all the crazies start coming out of the woodwork, he thought to himself, as he glanced at the underwear, stopping short of touching it. But something about the stark white thong caught his attention; a scarlet colored embroidery, partially visible from where it lie straddling the drain. With one gloved finger, he gingerly lifted the garment, a sense of horror striking him like the crack of a whip when his eyes fell upon the familiar *CJR* monogram. He Stood before the counter, momentarily immobilized by a jumble of emotions, when

suddenly, he turned and headed for the bedroom, the throng firmly grasped in his gloved hand. Hastily, he rummaged through Connie's chest of drawers and withdrew a pair of light blue underwear. That bastard, he said to himself, while comparing the two identically embroidered thongs, just what I thought, their the same, right down to the obscure European brand that she obsessed over, had to have and paid a fortune for. But could this still be a clever scam? However, even if they somehow found out about the brand and her size, how would anybody have known about that damn monogram? He sat down on the bed, his head pounding, and tried to conjure an alternative explanation. I've got a bad feeling about this, he said to himself, and if I was wrong about NAPCO, they'll make me pay for sure. But, then again, how do I know that this isn't a NAPCO setup and that the illiterate author isn't one of their agents? I suppose that I'll never know unless I go, regardless of the risk.

He left the bedroom, headed for his office and unlocked the wallsafe. Hesitating briefly, he reached in and grabbed the shiny snub-nosed revolver. Flipping open the cylinder, he filled the empty chambers and carried the weapon back to the living room to work on his plan of action.