

PROLOGUE

Bright sunlight filtered through the blinds over the bedroom window. Vicky forced her eyes open and tapped her iWatch. *Seven thirty. I'm late again.*

The man sleeping next to her rolled onto his back. She lay still, taking in the sight of him. *It's not like I'm a doctor or a soldier or even a policeman. Nobody is going to die if I just lie here awhile.*

She lifted her hand and gazed at the diamond ring he had given her at dinner yesterday. It was beautiful, and she smiled remembering how he sank to one knee before the waiter had a chance to bring her hot lava cake.

She touched his hair and traced her fingers along his chest and belly. When they found their destination, his eyes flew open. She laughed and displayed her ring. "You can't deny me any longer."

He laughed. "As if that would ever happen."

Later, in the shower, Vicky wrapped her arms around his neck and whispered. "I don't want this weekend to end. Let's call in sick."

She knew it wasn't going to happen. Right out of law school, Kyle had landed a job as an attorney for Barrington, Goldsmith and Lockhart, the most prestigious law firm in the District of Columbia. He wasn't even a junior partner yet, and his future depended upon putting in at least eighty hours a week, never missing a day no matter how ill he was, and never ever coming in late. He was already thirty minutes behind schedule. He shook his head. "You know I can't."

She nibbled at his ear. "We could have a picnic at Great Falls and come back here for a little hanky-panky."

He kissed her, and looked as if he might change his mind, but said. "If there were a way, I'd lock myself in this room with you and never come out, but I just got engaged. I can't afford to lose my job."

Disappointed, Vicky turned off the water and stepped out of the shower. She had not been honest with him. He deserved to know the truth, and she had hoped to spend the day correcting that mistake. “If you put it that way, I guess I’ll go in to work too, but try to leave early. I have a surprise.”

“What?”

“I’ll tell you as soon as you come in the door.”

Vicky walked from her apartment to the Metro, hand-in-hand with Kyle. They stepped onto the subway car that would take him to his office and her to her job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Commuters filled all the seats. Vicky knew better than to expect one of the men to relinquish his place. That kind of chivalry had died before she was born, but she didn’t care.

She held to Kyle and counted her blessings. She loved him and he loved her. She would tell him everything tonight.

The train jerked forward. She tripped over someone’s foot and would have fallen if not for Kyle’s firm grip on her arm. The foot belonged to a man with Middle-Eastern features, a dark blue suit, and a striped necktie. He clutched his briefcase to his chest and responded to her apology with a curt nod.

Kyle stared at him but said nothing. The man tightened his grip on the briefcase and looked back and forth in every direction except toward Kyle. After several minutes, the train stopped. Kyle kissed Vicky. “I’ll try to get off early.”

She squeezed his hand. “I love you.”

“Me too.” He stepped off the car onto the platform. Vicky wanted to go with him. She wanted to tell him everything.

The dark-skinned man stood, and for the first time, smiled at her. Something about his appearance bothered her, but she returned his smile and took his seat as he moved toward the doors. They slammed against him, bounced open, and then shut as he disappeared into the crowd, his cellphone in his hand.

She berated herself for profiling until her foot bumped against the briefcase that he had left under the seat. *Oh God!*

She jumped to her feet. Through the glass she could see Kyle as he looked from the man back to her. He dove for the doors and tried to pull them open, but the car jerked forward, breaking his grip.

Then a bright flash and an ear-piercing sound ended it all.

1. Five Years Later

Special Agent Kyle Murphy walked into the office of Special Agent in Charge George Fredricks in the Miami FBI Field Office. Kyle could tell from the tense lines in his boss's face that the impromptu meeting was not to discuss a merit raise. He stood and waited as George rummaged through papers as if he could not be bothered by the interruption.

Kyle gazed past the Rutgers University law diploma on the wall and through the window at the clear Florida sky. He did not want to be here. He belonged outside on the street looking for Carlos.

George lifted his eyes and spoke with a terse New Jersey accent. "This has got to stop. We don't have the resources to drop everything and chase after a ghost every time your imagination goes haywire."

Kyle placed his hands on the desk and leaned toward George. "I saw him. He was driving a black Escalade on Biscayne Boulevard."

His boss shook his head. "That's the third time in a month you've thought you spotted him. How come nobody else ever gets a glimpse of him?"

"Maybe they aren't looking." *Maybe they aren't as motivated as I am.*

George took a deep breath and leaned back in his swivel chair. "We have a whole team of agents working the case, and you aren't on the team."

"Well I should be. I'm the only agent who has ever seen the man. He's the reason I joined the FBI." *And he's going to pay for killing Vicky.*

“You had your chance five years ago. Did a fine job capturing his accomplice. Then you lost it. Broke his jaw after you arrested him.”

“He tried to escape.” His thoughts stayed with Vicky. *Her mother said she was pregnant. She wanted to tell me. I was such an ass. If I had just gone on that picnic, she'd still be alive.*

George stood and poked a finger at Kyle's chest. “If Carlos had not snuck into the emergency room and killed the man before he could talk, we'd have faced a huge lawsuit.”

Kyle didn't care. The terrorist had blabbed about every detail of the subway bombing. “I almost arrested Carlos. If they hadn't taken me off the task force, I would have. Put me back on it, and I will catch him.”

George opened and closed his fists—a sure sign that the meeting was not going well. “There's no place in the FBI for a vigilante. You're lucky the director didn't kick your ass out of the agency.” He dropped his hands to his hips and took a deep breath before continuing. “You had a lucrative job in the best law firm in the District of Columbia before you quit. I think you should go back and start over there.”

Kyle caught his breath. He knew he was in trouble, but George's hard stare stunned him. “You're firing me?”

George stepped around his desk and opened the door. “For the moment, just consider it some fatherly advice.”

There was nothing fatherly about the scowl on George's face. Kyle moved toward the exit. He knew George was right. If he had stayed the course, he would be a full partner now with more money than he could spend. Even if he stayed in the FBI, the people with the power would never let him focus on the man who murdered Vicky.

He bit his tongue rather than deliver the retort that rose in his throat. George did not appreciate constructive criticism, especially when it was laced with terms like “shithead” and “scumbag.”

Kyle stormed out of the office, slamming the door so hard that the pictures of distinguished politicians on the walls bounced out of their perfect alignment. He marched down the hallway past his partner and best friend, Larry Lucky, who sat at his desk with the telephone receiver held to his ear. Larry looked as agitated as Kyle felt. He relinquished the phone and caught Kyle by the arm. "Where're you going?"

"Out of here." Kyle glanced back at the office of the Special Agent in Charge. George glared at him from the now open doorway.

Larry laughed. "George looks like he might explode. I'm coming with you."

Kyle picked up his pace. "George is stubborn as your Doberman when that bitch next door goes into heat."

Larry followed lockstep with him. "Let me guess. It's the terrorism task force. He won't reinstate you."

"How did I get a partner with such brilliant perceptive powers?" He stepped outside onto the sidewalk. The heat radiated through his leather soles, and the sun bore down on him as if it were August instead of November. He stopped and faced Larry. "They haven't accomplished a thing since giving me the boot. Carlos is still out there—biding his time—planning his next massacre."

Larry could have been Kyle's brother. He shared the same brown hair, blue eyes, square jaw, muscular build, and six-foot height—the prime difference being Larry was losing the hair on the top of his head. He draped an arm over Kyle's shoulder. "Let's take a drive."

Kyle gritted his teeth. He did not want another lecture on the merits of being a team player. "Why?"

"Glenda doesn't answer the phone."

Pregnancy did not agree with Larry's wife. Her belly was too big, her legs were too swollen, and the last time she had gone to the doctor, her blood pressure was too high. The doc wanted to admit her, but she refused.

She had Kyle over for dinner at least twice a week, and last night she had looked like crap. She had several contractions but refused to go to the ER,

saying, "Tina didn't come for three days after the first contraction. I'm not going to lie around in some hospital bed for three days. I'll go when I'm ready."

Glenda was a poster girl for the strong-willed woman, and neither Kyle nor Larry had succeeded in convincing her to change her mind.

Kyle had stewed about her after he left at eleven p.m., and now he felt a tightening in his chest. Glenda worried too much about Larry getting killed in his dangerous job and was compulsive about answering all phone calls, especially if they came from his phone. He looked across the lot at Larry's car. "Why are we standing here?"

Kyle climbed into the passenger seat of Larry's Jeep Cherokee. He wondered how his partner kept the vehicle spotless with that just-off-the-lot look when he used it to tote his two-year-old daughter Tina, who liked to throw her plastic cup and to watch apple juice rain down on everybody and everything in its path. He failed to understand how the upholstery and her Chicco car seat looked like new.

Larry lived only twenty minutes away, but he surpassed the speed limit by twenty miles per hour. Kyle wished he would drive faster. *Why couldn't she have just done what the doctor told her to do?* "We should have taken her to the hospital when the contractions started."

Larry kept his eyes on the road. "She wouldn't get in the car. You heard her."

"We should have made her go."

"You don't make an Irish woman do anything, and she was better this morning. No contractions since midnight."

Larry skidded into his driveway. Both men rushed into the house. Roland, the Doberman, jumped on Kyle and licked his face. Kyle scratched him behind the ears, but Larry pushed him aside and hurried to the kitchen. Glenda stood by the oven, holding Tina. She shifted her daughter to her right hip and used a spatula to lift chocolate chip cookies off a metal pan onto a red, white, and blue plate. "What are you guys doing here at this hour? Dinner isn't until six."

Kyle felt his heart slow toward normal. He took a hot cookie and bit into it. “Just checking to see what goodies you’ve cooked.” It tasted like it smelled—sweet and chocolaty.

Larry relaxed his shoulders. “I called. You didn’t answer.”

Glenda set their child on the floor. “Tina was in the tub. I was going to call you back.”

“I just worry about you.”

“I know, but I’m fine. Really.”

Tina ran to Kyle and wrapped her arms around his legs. He hugged her and wondered what it would have been like if Vicky had lived to have his child—if she hadn’t stepped onto that subway car with Carlos.

Glenda served French vanilla coffee while the men consumed the cookies. “Now you guys know how I feel every day. Why couldn’t you have found a civilized profession that didn’t involve guns?”

Larry laughed. “Who would hire Kyle?”

Kyle brushed crumbs off his shirt. “You know, the real reason we’ll never leave is chicks love FBI agents. The badge is an aphrodisiac. Why do you think Larry is so tired when he comes home?”

Glenda pulled up a chair and joined the men at the kitchen table. “Larry is tired because you chase all over town looking for that terrorist, and he goes along to keep you out of trouble—and something must be wrong with your badge, or you wouldn’t be over here almost every night for dinner.”

“Are you kidding? Sex can’t compare to your meatloaf.”

Larry pushed his chair away from the table. “We’ve got to get back to work.”

Glenda kissed his cheek. “You be careful.” She caught Kyle by the sleeve. “Look after my man. I don’t want to raise this baby by myself.”

Kyle tossed Larry’s hair. “Don’t you worry about a thing. I’ll take good care of your sweetie.”

Larry stayed at the speed limit as he turned onto U.S. Highway 1. “Did you have to make that comment about chicks and FBI agents?”

Kyle slapped him on the shoulder. “Don’t be paranoid. You’re like a vulture. You mate for life, and Glenda knows it.”

“I’ll be glad when the baby comes. She worries me.”

“Me too.”

Kyle looked out the window as a black Escalade flew past them. The driver had black hair, a black beard, tan skin, and high cheekbones. Kyle only got a glimpse of him, but his heart felt like it turned over in his chest. “Follow that Cadillac!”

“Really?”

“Yes! Hurry.”

Larry pulled into the traffic three cars behind the Escalade. “Let me guess. You saw Carlos.”

“He’s the driver.”

Larry banged his hand against the steering wheel. “Carlos isn’t even in this country. He left a year ago.”

“It’s him.”

Larry tilted his head and squinted at Kyle. “I know a good optician. If you’d just go see him, it might save us hundreds of wasted man hours.”

“I saw his face.”

The Escalade stayed just below the speed limit. Larry kept several cars back to avoid being seen. “I know he killed your fiancée, but this obsession—you’ve got to let go.”

Kyle fell into that dark portion of his mind—the part that deals with grief and remorse—the place where Vicky still lived. He could see her lying next to him in their oversized bed, smiling at him as if there really were a tomorrow. “There wasn’t much left of her after the bomb. Just the few pieces we put in the coffin.”

Larry let out a deep sigh. “It’s been five years. It’s time to move on.”

“I’ll move on when Carlos is dead.”

They drove for thirty minutes before the SUV turned off U.S. 1. Larry kept a respectable distance until the Escalade passed through the gate of a chain-link fence and parked beside a warehouse. He stopped forty yards back.

Kyle pointed as the bearded man, wearing blue jeans, black boots, and a jacket, stepped out of the Cadillac.

Larry pulled the binoculars from the glove box and adjusted the focus. "Holy shit. It really is Carlos. At least he looks like the artist's sketch."

Kyle clenched his teeth. "I told you. Call for backup."

Larry rang for Anthony Testa, their supervisory agent, as Carlos disappeared through the back door of the building. Kyle stepped from the Jeep and threw his sport coat onto the empty seat. Without waiting for his partner, he marched through the gate.

Within a minute, Larry rushed after Kyle. He caught up with him beside the warehouse. "Anthony said to wait."

Steam rose from the pavement, and the odor of rotted food emanated from an overflowing garbage can. It was a fitting place for Carlos to die. Kyle pulled his Glock from its holster. "The hell with that. We have an active federal warrant from the Washington bombing, and it might take them an hour to get here. Carlos could be long gone by then."

Larry stepped between Kyle and the building. "This is why they won't let you back on the task force."

Kyle felt bile rise in his throat. He stopped and faced his partner. "What're you saying?"

Larry folded his arms in front of his chest. "Your fixation on Carlos—it's not rational."

Kyle stepped around him. "Carlos killed Vicky. If you aren't coming, get out of my way."

"Sometimes you can be a real asshole." Larry opened the door.