

# PASSAGE OF TIME

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# CHAPTER 1

## *Cache la Poudre River, Colorado 2005*

**F**or the past two days, Ali had been stationed on the braided rug in front of Jake's rocking chair, curled into a doggy rendition of the fetal position. She had vacated the spot only to meet the call of nature, or to periodically slurp a mouthful of water from the stainless-steel bowl resting next to a dish of untouched food.

Kate Hunter hunkered down to stroke the dog's head. Although she deeply missed her father, witnessing what the dog was going through because of Jake's death put her own grief in perspective. She ran her hand over the German shorthaired pointer's liver-and-white-ticked coat. Usually sleek and glistening, it looked muddied, felt rough.

She hugged the dog before unfurling from her crouched position in time to see a battered red truck winding its way up the dirt drive leading to the cabin that backed onto the Cache la Poudre River.

Usually Ali would have alerted her long before the vehicle became visible.

Clapping her hands twice, she said with feigned excitement, "Ali! Company!" The dog's only response was a partial lifting of one eyelid before it re-lowered.

Kate wished she could as easily retreat from the world, for her emotions were too raw to sit through a will reading, even if the reader happened to be her father's longtime friend and lawyer, Frank Running Bear. She would

have gladly put off the ordeal – in fact, she had tried, but the lawyer had been most insistent when he had cornered her after yesterday’s funeral.

He had given her hand an avuncular pat. “Sorry, Kate. Some things need to be dealt with sooner than later. Shall I pop in tomorrow afternoon? Say around two? Better to do this in the comfort of the cabin than in my stuffy office.”

Now the moment was upon her, and somehow, she had to get through it. Her hair – the store-bought shade was a tossup between mahogany and auburn – was naturally straight and styled in a no-fuss, chin-length bob. She tucked a lock of hair behind one ear, plastered a smile on her face, and prepared herself to greet the grey-haired lawyer.

From the living room, she watched Frank awkwardly exit the truck. It was obvious from the way he limped toward the cabin that he was in pain, but his coppery face – dominated by high, round cheekbones and a delicately thin nose – revealed the stoic expression she had seen in the photos of his Arapaho ancestors.

She never could decide whether his refusal to have a long-needed hip transplant was linked to his Native American heritage of stoicism, or to modern male pride, or the down-and-out stubbornness that made him not only a good lawyer, but also a prosperous one. He was certainly rich enough to afford a new truck, but for some unfathomable reason preferred the battered one.

Dressed in his usual office attire of blue jeans, bolo tie and plaid flannel shirt, he looked ready to plough a field instead of wading through the terms of her father’s will. Today’s shirt was red and white, the bolo tie clasp revealing the silver head of a buffalo on a turquoise background.

As Kate opened the porch door, Ali torpedoed past her, all but flying down the verandah steps, the animal’s tail sweeping back and forth like a metronome set to a *prestissimo* tempo.

The lawyer was a few feet from reaching the bottom of the steps, and in real danger of being upended by the dog’s enthusiasm. Kate was too astounded by the drastic turnabout in Ali’s behavior to voice a reprimand, but fortunately the dog arrested its forward motion in time, thus saving Frank from being sent ass over teakettle. Then to Kate’s surprise, the dog chased its tail twice before collapsing onto the ground to assume a dead-dog

pose at the lawyer's feet. It was a trick Jake had taught Ali, and which the dog had faithfully executed whenever Kate's father had arrived home from one of his outings.

She smiled apologetically at the lawyer.

"Sorry for the exuberant welcome Ali gave you, Frank."

The lawyer leaned over to rub the dog's exposed belly. "The welcome's for Jake, isn't it, girl?" he said, patting Ali's head.

He straightened, and noting Kate's baffled expression, nodded at the terracotta vessel wedged in the crook of his left arm, which left his left hand free to clutch the manila envelope she presumed contained the will.

Not trusting herself to voice a reply, she merely nodded. She had intended to bring the urn containing her father's ashes home after the funeral, but Frank had insisted he hold on to it until today.

The lawyer now handed the urn to Kate, who fought back a wave of grief as she preceded Frank and the bouncing dog into the cabin.

Carpentry had been one of her father's hobbies, and Jake had been skilled enough to make the wooden sofa and armchairs that graced the living room. Kate's job had been to tweak the furniture with bright floral cushions, sewn on the Singer sewing machine Jake and she had unearthed among clutter in a backroom of a Fort Collins antique shop. Neither she nor her father had wanted to obstruct the outside views, so the windows lacked coverings, except for the softening valances she had made from fabric matching the cushions.

The bright décor and stone fireplace gave the room a comfortable appearance, but Kate was feeling anything but comfortable as she clutched the urn, trying to decide where to set it.

Frank nodded at the vessel.

"Hard to believe such a small thing contains the remains of someone as burly as Jake. Never knew a man who could pack away food the way he could. Had a knack for devouring it quickly without making it seem so. Being a fast eater myself, it's a trait I envy." He chortled. "Betsy says my way of eating reminds her of a runaway train barreling down a steep hill." Betsy was Frank's Arapaho wife.

After some deliberation, Kate finally placed the urn on the stone mantel.

She directed a brave smile at the lawyer. “Jake said the urn would look good here after I *dumped* him out.” She felt her bottom lip begin to tremble. “I can’t believe I actually laughed when he said it. Even if I didn’t know at the time that he was dying, why would I laugh, Frank? What kind of daughter does that?”

The lawyer took a step toward her and stopped, as though sensing any physical show of comfort from him would be her undoing.

“Your father had an uncanny knack for knowing what lies ahead. A person as in tune with himself as Jake was would know when time is running out. He’d have wanted to make light of things for your sake, don’t you think?”

Kate sniffed back a tear as she turned back to admire the design on the urn’s face. “As you know, he made the urn, fired it in his kiln. I remember the day he showed me the design. Of course, I didn’t know then it would end up being on...”

Her gaze swiveled back to the lawyer.

“I asked him why he chose an eagle soaring above a snow-capped mountain. He said it came to him in a vision. You know me, Frank. I’m way too practical to believe in visions, but not Jake. You might say he lived his life by them. I never could convince him they were merely the result of an overactive imagination.”

He nodded.

“Bit of a mystic was Jake. But unlike you, I do believe in visions. Can’t have my family history and not believe in them.”

Kate wandered into the kitchen to set about making tea, Frank joining her at the kitchen table while they waited for the tea to steep.

He smiled and shook his head. “Never saw a white man who respected nature the way your father did. Or had such a way with critters. The day we crossed paths with that grizzly and her cubs is one I’ll not forget. Jake, he just stayed his ground and talked to that grizzly in a tone a hypnotist might use, and damned if it didn’t work. That grizzly all but curtsied before she herded her cubs together and disappeared back into the forest.”

Ali soon joined them, wolfing down the food in her dish before retreating into the living room, where she settled down within sight of the urn. The dog may have been her graduation present, but Kate had long ago accepted

Ali's heart belonged to her father. It had been that way from the start, and evidently not even death could change it.

Kate's thoughts were scattered as she poured the tea, and arranged mini pastries on a plate, the pastries being sympathy gifts from neighbors and friends.

She knew one of the things to be discussed pertained to Jake's wishes concerning his remains. Her father had been a nature lover, and it would be like him to want his ashes dispersed at some spot dear to him. She wondered if there were rules pertaining to the scattering of a loved one's ashes and knew neither she nor Ali was ready for such a final parting.

"It's not like there's a law that says a person *must* disperse a loved one's remains," she said, giving voice to her thoughts.

Frank shifted uncomfortably in his seat, drank some tea, carefully set the mug back down in front of him. He laid his palms flat out on the table with his fingers splayed, cleared his throat.

"As you know, a will is a legal document, and as such, its terms – even those pertaining to the dispersal of remains – should be followed." He held up a forestalling hand when Kate began to protest. "Don't get your knickers in a knot, Kate. The terms aren't unreasonable...just a tad unusual, that's all."

The lawyer cracked open the manila envelope, passed a copy of the will to Kate, picked up his copy. "Being a cop, you're used to the legalese, which makes my job easier. All the same, anything you don't understand, stop me and I'll explain it to you."

Ali came to sit beside Kate, the dog's head repeatedly nudging her arm. It was as though Ali knew exactly what was happening and was there to lend support. Idly Kate scratched behind the dog's ear. Meanwhile the lawyer's voice droned on. The first part of the will was straightforward. As his sole descendent, Kate inherited all of Jake's material possessions. The cabin he had built before she was born, all its contents, and the money residing in his bank accounts at the time of his death – they now were hers. Even when she learned she was now a rich woman, the knowledge brought no happiness. She would gladly toss the inheritance away in a heartbeat if it meant she could have more time with her father. Jake had been her keel, a steadying influence in both good and difficult times.

“Well...that’s about it, except for what he wanted done when it comes to his remains,” Frank said, pulling her from her thoughts. “He was very specific about the conditions. First, both you and Ali must be present.”

“Nothing unusual about that. Ali and he were inseparable.”

The lawyer’s finger tapped the sheet of paper in his hand. “It’s this here second condition that’s a tad strange. I never knew Jake to care what day it was. Always said one’s as good as the next.”

Kate nodded. “I used to have to tell him we had to be somewhere an hour or so earlier, so we wouldn’t be late. I bought him a watch one Christmas that he never used. As you know, Frank, my father preferred to measure time, not by minutes or hours, but by the sun and moon and the change of seasons.”

The lawyer nodded. “It likely explains why he wanted you to disperse his remains on June 21 at sunrise. It’s my wife who realized that’s the day of the summer solstice.”

“I can do that, but not this year, Frank.”

“Jake was quite definite that it be done *this* year.”

“But that’s only two weeks away. It doesn’t leave much time for Ali and me to prepare ourselves.”

She scanned her copy of the will.

“There’s nothing about where the deed should be done. He’s specific about the when but not the where. My father was a detail man, so I find that strange.”

She took a mini pastry and popped it into her mouth, swallowing it down with some tea. “What happens if I choose not to do anything? I mean it’s not like Jake would press charges, even if he could.”

The lawyer fully met her gaze. “Neither will I if you choose to oppose your father’s last wishes.”

“Holy Jumpin’ Jehoshaphat! You really know how to give a daughter a guilt trip.”

Setting his empty cup in the sink, the lawyer said with a wistful smile, “That was your father’s favorite expression. Hearing you say it makes me almost believe he’s still present.”

Needing time alone to digest everything, Kate turned down the lawyer's offer to help her clear the table. "Go on outside, Frank. I know you want a cigarette. I'll join you when I'm done here."

When she finished in the kitchen and finally wandered outside, she found Frank on the veranda, ensconced in one of the Adirondack chairs. Taking the chair next to him, she found comfort in the familiar melody of the nearby river. From the upper boughs of a spruce tree came the repeated tee-da-lett of a kinglet's fading song. One of the least chipmunks Jake had befriended sat on a nearby decaying log, feeding on insects and chattering to its mate, who scampered onto the log, cheek pouches jammed with berries or nuts or some such treat. Everywhere Kate looked were reminders that life went on no matter what.

Frank sighed.

"Sure spent a lot of time looking at this view and swapping tales with Jake over a beer or two. I'm going to miss those times." He lit another cigarette and blew out a series of smoke rings. "I remember the day he came to my office the first time, wanting to adopt you. He had you in a cradleboard strapped to his back Indian style. Said it was better than pushing a buggy. Made me instantly like him."

"Gosh, Frank. That was almost thirty years ago. I've been so caught up in my own grief, I haven't thought about what it must be like for you to lose a longtime friend." She passed the next few minutes in reflective silence, then said, "I don't much like the timing, but I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do as Jake wanted. We – Ali and I – well, we want you there when we scatter the ashes."

The lawyer patted her hand. "That's a sweet thought, but I'm going to decline. Had Jake wanted anyone besides you and Ali, he'd have specified it."

Frank went to retrieve something from his car, returning shortly with a rectangular metal box, about the length and width of a sheet of A4 paper and about a foot in depth. "Jake gave me this soon after we met, with instructions that I give it to you after he died." He handed it to her, along with a key. "It was locked when I received it and has stayed that way, so I've no idea what's in it."



The sun had not yet risen when Kate set off on a six-mile jog to keep in shape. Her work as an FBI crisis negotiator with the Denver office was more mentally demanding than physical, but she believed in maintaining a rigorous exercise routine. It allowed her to keep up with her male cohorts, putting a few of them to shame – no small feat. Jogging and working out with weights not only kept her body buffed, but her mind sharp and her senses alert. She needed all of that to resolve a kidnapping, hostage, or barricade situation.

She liked the way the cool morning air rushed against her face as she picked up her pace to match Ali's. The dog's breed demanded lots of vigorous exercise, and Ali was enjoying the outing as much as Kate. Even so, it had taken a lot of coercing and finally ingenuity to get the dog away from the cabin, where they both had been sequestered for days – Kate sorting through Jake's belongings, while the dog maintained a constant vigil over the urn.

She was glad nobody except Ali had been there to witness her stowing the urn in the pack now strapped to her back. The dog had no problems with it, and neither did she. It was rather comforting to have Jake guarding her back as he used to do whenever they hit the horse trails during one of their wilderness camping adventures.

The first hint of dawn crept onto the horizon – ribbons of muted light weaving through the darkness, chasing away the pellucid stars. She loved the peacefulness of running at this time of day, the quiet disturbed only by Ali's breath sounds, her own inhaled and exhaled, and the swish of her Nikes contacting the canyon highway's dirt shoulder. Soon the first chorus of birdsong erupted. By the time she was a mile into her run, the fiery sun was slipping up from the east, smearing the sky with pudgy fingers of indigo, pale blue, and rose.

Her mind fell into the hypnotic rhythm set by her feet. It was early on, her legs fresh, so no need to keep her mind active to dull the aches and pains that would come. She hit the second mile point in record time, checked her pulse, found it within acceptable range.

On her iPod, Billy Joel was singing about not starting the fire when she spotted the stag preparing to cross the road about thirty yards ahead. Its new antlers – the bone still cartilage-soft – were about half-grown, covered with a velvet layer of short, fine hair. The antlers were living, growing things, and Kate knew if she touched them, they would feel warm and pulsating. By the end of July, they would be fully grown – the calcification incomplete, so the bone still fragile.

The deer was fair game for Ali, who charged after it, scaring it back into the woods. The cracking sound of underbrush being trampled told her the dog was in hot pursuit. Ali had a keen scenting ability, whether the target was critters or illicit drugs. Periodically Kate used the dog in drug-finding training exercises for the FBI. If Ali's scenting ability was keen, her tracking ability was superior. Given enough time, Kate had no doubt the dog would pin down the deer, so she slowed her pace, stuck two fingers in her mouth and let out a shrill whistle. Within seconds, the dog was back at her side, looking somewhat disgruntled for having been called off the pursuit.

The sun was now two finger-widths above the horizon. Soon the peaceful solitude would be marred by vehicles of commuters coursing along the highway on their way to workplaces in Fort Collins. Wanting to complete at least half her run before that happened, she picked up her pace.

The first vehicle passed her just shy of the turnaround point. By the time she started on the return leg, she felt her quads begin to tighten and burn.

The Bee Gees were singing about how to mend broken hearts when her mind kicked in as an escape mechanism against the physical hurts now plaguing her. She was too practical to believe a heart actually could break, but it sure could feel that way. Two or three times in the past week she had been caught off-guard by an emotion so overpowering, it literally had taken her breath away. For someone so practical, she had been naïve when it came to Jake...never giving a thought to tomorrows or the sorrow they could bring. She doubted being prepared would have made things easier, for she could not imagine her grief being less intense than what it currently was.

Somewhere she had read that pain was a gift with a very specific purpose. She could not get her head – or heart – around that concept. It was easier to believe what her well-meaning friends kept telling her: time and keeping busy would dull the hurt. She was banking on both to see her and Ali through

this. She thought of the urn's contents. As much as she wanted to keep her promise to Frank about following Jake's wishes, would she be able to when the time came? The question had been on her mind ever since the will reading.

The necessary task of dealing with Jake's belongings had allowed her to avoid thinking about things she had not been ready to face. The metal box remained in the same state as when Frank had given it to her, its contents still a mystery. In truth, she was afraid to open it, for she had begun thinking of it as a Pandora's box of bad tidings. If it was not so, why had she only just learned of its presence?

Casting her gaze skyward, she saw only a carpet of blueness. The sun was a cheerful ball of amber, spraying its warmth everywhere. It was an ideal day to face the unknown, she decided.

## CHAPTER 2

**B**rian Turalski spread the blanket on the ground near the entrance to the cave he and Kate had discovered when they were teenagers. The cave was within view of the Cache la Poudre River, and a short horse ride from the cabin.

Brian kept his brown hair buzzed, no matter the season. He had a runner's compact build that allowed him to race around a baseball diamond, and an inquisitive mind that had made him an award-winning investigative reporter with the Fort Collins daily newspaper, *The Coloradoan*.

Kate patted his arm. "Thanks for changing your plans to be with me today."

She could not recall a time when Brian and his family had not been a part of her life. Like Jake, Brian's father, Wislaw Turalski, had been interested in rocks and the minerals they contained. The two men had met by chance, their geological interests soon making them firm companions, and sometimes working partners on government projects.

Izabella Turalski was as much a mother to her as she was to Brian and his three siblings. She had seen Kate through her first menstrual cycle, taught her how to make traditional Polish dishes, even interceded on her behalf to convince Jake that law enforcement was not the worse career his daughter could have chosen.

Squatting to place her backpack on the blanket, she now sighed. "This place will always be special to me, because it's where I was first kissed."

His hand found hers to pull her upright. "Let's go see the heart tree."

Until her sixteenth birthday, Kate had looked on Brian solely as a brother. Then he had arrived at the cabin that May morning with a hamper of

Izabella's food, informing her he was taking her on a picnic as his present to her. They had been standing at the entrance to this very cave when suddenly he had pulled her into his arms to deliver a kiss that had been anything but brotherly. It had been the first time a boy had kissed her, and because it had been Brian, she had felt confused. To mark the occasion, he had carved into the bark of one of the riverbank trees a heart with their initials. The kiss had never meant as much to her as it had to him, and despite her efforts to convince him otherwise, she suspected he still harbored the hope their relationship eventually would blossom into something beyond friendship.

Arriving at the riverbank, they found the heart tree, a forty-foot aspen, had been damaged from a lightning strike. In two places, the bark had been carved from the very top to the bottom of the tree's trunk. Three-foot strips of bark resembling giant toothpicks littered the surrounding ground.

Kate pointed to several burn holes around the exposed roots of the tree. "It must have been some storm for the lightning to strip the trunk like that and leave these burn holes. It's a wonder the tree's still standing."

Brian ran his hand over one of the bare sections. "If the lightning had struck closer to the center of the trunk instead of the outer edge, the tree wouldn't be." The lightning had obliterated their carved initials, leaving untouched only parts of the heart's perimeter. "Some things aren't meant to be," he said with a shrug.

He was unusually quiet on their way back to the cave, and Kate was thinking it had to do with his ongoing romantic feelings for her when he stopped suddenly, his words spewing out like Old Faithful. "I'm in love. Her name is Cynthia. She's got brains, a smile that sends me into a tailspin, and she laughs at my jokes."

Kate playfully punched his arm. "Sounds serious."

"More than serious...I'm going to ask her to marry me."

Her mouth fell open. "No way!" She gave him another playful slap. "You haven't told me her last name or where you met...or when you knew she was the one. Aren't reporters supposed to be good at providing details?"

"I'll fill in the five Ws while we eat," he laughingly promised.

They stopped to check on their horses and to retrieve from the saddlebags the sandwiches, lemonade, and leftover funeral pastries Kate had packed.

They had barely begun to eat when Brian began filling in the details. Kate learned Cynthia Christopoulos was American-born, but her heritage was Greek. She had a law degree from California's Stanford Law School, worked in Fort Collins, and had been the prosecuting attorney on a court case that stemmed from Brian's investigative reporting on insider trading. By the time he finished sharing the details, Kate had no doubt Brian had found his soul mate.

"As I've got the ring with me, I wouldn't mind getting your take on it," he said, pulling a green velvet case from his shirt pocket.

The princess-cut diamond looked expensive enough to have put a walloping hole in Brian's bank account.

"Cynthia will absolutely pee her pants when you give it to her," Kate gushed as she slipped the ring on her finger and admired the way it glistened in the sunlight.

"You really think she'll like it?"

"It's certainly got my vote. But I can't believe you're carrying it around with you. You'd better give it to her ASAP, before you lose it."

"That's what my mom said, so I was on my way to do that when you called."

"Oh, Brian." The thought that he had put her first on such an important occasion made her appreciate their friendship even more.

He leaned over to give her a brotherly hug. "I'll always be there for you, Kate." He nodded at the backpack. "Don't you think it's time you showed me why you really asked me here?"

"You know me too well," she said, removing the metal box from the backpack. Then she explained how it came to be hers, and how she felt about opening it. As she inserted the key and unlocked the box, she looked nervously at Brian.

Encouraged by his nod, she lifted the lid and immediately became immersed in the scent of antiquity, like the kind that lingered on Jake's prized collection of old books. The familiarity of it eased her apprehension. Soon she was feeling the rush of excitement that comes from opening a Christmas gift as she viewed the contents: a square white cardboard box, a faded envelope – and lying at the bottom of the metal box, an object concealed in tissue paper yellowed from age.

“Let’s see what’s in the white box,” Brian suggested. The box was so plain looking she could not imagine finding anything of worth in it. But when she removed the lid, he let out a whistle. “That’s some bling!”

Kate stared at the oval pendant. Fashioned from silver, and edged with a twisted rope pattern, the piece of jewelry was exquisite despite its unpolished state. An embossed silver feather ran diagonally across the pendant’s face, dividing it into two unequal sections. The larger upper portion was enhanced with a teardrop ivory stone and an embossed snowflake design of six silver beads around a central one. The lower portion held a similar snowflake and a translucent green stone – smaller in size than the ivory stone and oval.

As she took hold of the pendant to withdraw it from the box, she felt an immediate spark that was more intense than the electrostatic charge caused by rubbing one’s feet on a carpet and then touching an object.

Her thumb stroked over the pendant’s face, exploring the ridges and recesses of the design. The ivory stone felt smooth and surprisingly icy cold. In contrast, the translucent green stone was unexpectedly hot and seemed to pulsate, reminding her of a stag’s budding antlers. To Kate, the entire pendant appeared to be a living entity.

Brian ran his finger over the ivory stone.

“It’s amazing how icy it feels,” she remarked.

His one brow lifted. “More like room temperature to me.”

She tapped her finger on the top stone. “Although ivory’s not a gemstone or a rock mineral, people think of it that way when they see it in a piece of jewelry. White ivory commands a higher price. This ivory probably started out like that, but now has a tinge of yellow. It’s what happens over time.”

“Like old piano keys that are no longer white.”

“Exactly.”

His thumb rubbed over the bottom stone. She was anxious to know if it warmly pulsated for him but was reluctant to ask.

In response to his questioning look, she said, “It’s Wyoming nephrite jade. Considered to be one of the finest nephrites in the world. Sometimes it’s translucent, like this one, but it can also be opaque, or anything between. There are various colors. Off-white is rare. Most times, it’s some shade of green.” She tapped the stone with her finger, feeling again its vibrant heat.

“This type of jade isn’t found anymore, except in old pieces like this pendant.”

Brian smiled. “Seems you paid more attention to your father than I did to mine.”

“Somehow Jake always found a way to work a geology lesson into our adventure trips,” she told him.

By the time she was eight, she could correctly identify whether a rock was igneous, sedimentary or metamorphic. It was the mineral content of the rocks that eventually drew her interest, for she liked solving the puzzle of what lay concealed from view.

“Jake taught me a lot,” she said. “I think he was hoping I’d follow in his footsteps. Even though I didn’t, every time I go into a crisis situation, I take with me the mental skills he taught me. Often you must probe below the surface for the answers of how to resolve a crisis. Things aren’t always as they appear. Humans are complex beings, hostage takers and the like even more so.”

Carefully she returned the pendant to its box. It was too beautiful to remain there, but it needed a chain before she could wear it. Next, she picked up the envelope, which had become brittle with age, so it made a crinkling sound as her exploring touch tried to ascertain its contents.

“You’ll never find out unless you open it,” Brian teased.

It had either never been sealed shut, or the glue had weakened, for when she gave the envelope a shake, what looked to be a photograph dropped upside down onto the blanket.

“Who is she?” Brian asked when Kate turned it over to reveal the sepia photograph of a woman.

Shrugging, she picked it up to scrutinize it.

The woman’s round cheekbones, and long, thin nose reminded her of Frank Running Bear. “Whoever she is, I think she might be Arapaho,” Kate said.

The woman’s dark hair was parted in the middle and worn in two neatly executed braids. From the background, it was evident the photo had been done in a studio. Rather than a head-on shot, the photographer had posed her looking to her left. From the visible ear dangled a large earring that looked to have been made from shell. As part of the earring, in front of the

shell portion, were cone-shaped objects. The photo was too old to discern if these were made of silver, or a dark metal...or of something entirely different. Around the woman's neck was a beaded necklace, the three strands of it falling nearly to her waist. The dress she wore – Kate presumed it was a dress, for the photo showed only the top half of the woman – was rather plain and light in color, except for a dark band of material circling the sleeve below each shoulder.

Overall the woman looked proud...and regal.

Kate gave another shrug. "I'm guessing she's Frank's wife, Betsy, when she was young. Jake must have wanted me to give the photo to him."

Brian looked skeptical. "You don't suppose he had a thing for Frank's wife? Things like that happen, you know."

"Definitely not. And besides, why would he leave the photo as a red flag to steer me in that direction? The whole idea's so totally not Jake."

"Yeah. Guess you're right."

She jabbed her index finger into his chest. "I know that look on your face. I've seen it a hundred times when Ali's on the scent. I'm telling you, Bri. You're on the wrong trail this time."

He picked up the envelope, blew into the open end to allow him to better see inside. When he rapped the envelope's open end against the heel of his palm, a folded piece of paper slid out, followed by a lock of raven black hair.

He and Kate exchanged surprised looks.

Brian held the lock against the hair in the photograph. "I'd lay bets it's Betsy's," he said with a smug smile. "Jake wouldn't have kept it had she not meant something to him."

"We don't even know if the woman is Betsy," Kate said moodily. "And if it is her, there has to be another explanation than the one you're offering."

Brian dropped the subject, and passed Kate the folded piece of paper, on which were written two decimal numbers.

"They mean nothing to me. How about you?" she asked, passing the paper back to him.

"I've no idea, but I doubt they're important."

Kate refolded the paper and returned it to the envelope. "Jake was always meticulous, Brian. Like the photo, he must have had a reason for including them."

“Maybe they mistakenly ended up in the envelope.”

“Perhaps,” Kate uttered without conviction.

As she removed the tissue-wrapped package from the box, she experienced a mixture of excitement and regret like what she felt whenever she opened a last Christmas present. The way the package molded to her touch as she placed it on the blanket suggested it contained clothing of some kind. To eke out the suspense, she dug out another pastry, and ate it slowly while staring at the parcel and ignoring Brian’s snicker. Finishing the pastry, she wiped her hands on her jeans before removing the tissue to expose a beautiful piece of ivory linen edged with a border of off-white hearts and crosshatching. She began unfolding the fabric to reveal a design of trios of pale pink roses, pastel green leaves and sky-blue butterflies.

She was almost finished unfolding what was turning out to be a shawl when Brian stopped the process to point out a series of stains and ugly rents in the fabric.

“Looks like someone splattered coffee or chocolate on it, then as if that weren’t enough, hacked at it with a knife,” he remarked. Her gasp caused him to look at her. “What’s wrong, Kate? All the color’s drained from your face.”

She looked bleakly at him. “I’ve been to enough crime scenes to know blood splatter when I see it.”



Wardlaw Jewelers – or simply John K’s as most people called it – was located in historic Old Town, in the same building where the multi-generational family-run business first opened its doors soon after Fort Collins was platted in 1867. The current owner, John Kenneth Wardlaw, had begun specializing in silver the year the store marked its hundredth anniversary. Now in his seventies, he was a distinguished grey-haired gentleman with an old-fashioned handlebar mustache that suited the store’s nineteenth-century decor.

It had been sheer procrastination that had made Kate stop here first. Her whole world had been turned upside down by the discovery of the bloody shawl. Her mind was dizzy from trying to solve the puzzle of the woman's identity, her possible connection to the shawl, and Jake's connection to both. Unthinkable was the possibility that her father could have been responsible for the shawl being in its ruined condition. As much as she could not believe him capable of such a crime, the seeds of suspicion had been sown, and she could not help wondering if his leaving her the evidence was a type of deathbed confession. Every time her mind headed down that avenue, she had to remind herself there was no proof a crime had been committed. The blood may have been inconsequential, and for whatever reason, Jake may have felt compelled to keep the shawl. There was not much he could have done to repair the rent, but why would he not have cleaned the shawl before storing it? It was a question that had dug a rut in her mind for the past two days. She knew Jake to be a caring father and the type of responsible citizen who would have wanted to find the perpetrator of a murderous crime no matter how long it took. Had this been his purpose in bequeathing her the box's contents? Had he been counting on her to use her police background to solve the crime, if indeed one had been committed? She had been with the Federal Bureau of Investigation for nearly five years so why had he waited so long? Unable to come up with any suitable answers, she had hoped to give her mind a respite by looking for a chain for the pendant.

John K returned from his backroom office with the pendant now polished. He placed it on a piece of black velvet, and then removed a collection of silver chains from the showcase.

"Your pendant demands a chain that's as exquisite as it is. Too fine a chain won't hold up to the pendant's weight, though." He selected one of the chains. "You need one this size – thick enough to do the job, yet still appears dainty. This one has the same twisted rope pattern as the pendant's," he noted as he slipped the pendant onto the chain. "Try it on, and we'll see if it's a good match."

Kate looked in the mirror the jeweler held up and gave a pleased nod. "It's a perfect match."

"I think so, too. I hope you know how lucky you are to have such a rare antique. I looked up the maker's mark in my book. Henry Ralph Shuman was

a silversmith and jeweler in Cincinnati and Kansas City before relocating to Denver. I wouldn't be surprised if he made it there. If he did, you've got something that dates between 1862 and 1880. It's a true century piece. If you ever want to part with it, I hope you'll give me first dibs on buying it."

Kate left wearing the pendant, and headed to Frank's law firm, located only a couple blocks from the jewelry store.

Welcoming her into his office, the lawyer directed her to the sofa, and sat down next to her. "What's up?" he asked.

She retrieved the bequeathed photograph. "This was in the box you gave me. I thought it might be of Betsy...when she was young."

He glanced at the photo and shook his head.

"Did my father ever show you the photo, or tell you who she is...or was?"

"No. Sepia photos, like that one, are really old. Jake never talked about the time before he found you on his doorstep."

"Do you think she might be Arapaho?"

Frank gave a light shrug. "Can't be certain, although her features suggest she might be."

Disappointed that she was no further ahead identifying the woman, Kate returned the photo to her purse. Next, she showed him the shawl, making sure to keep the damaged area hidden. But like the photo, he had no idea about its history.

"There's something else I wanted to discuss with you," she said. "I have to do something about the cabin. I've my apartment in Denver and don't see myself giving it up to do the daily commute from the cabin. As you know, Brian Turalski lives with his parents, but he'll be wanting a place of his own, now that he's engaged."

"Are you thinking of selling him the cabin?"

"No. I'm not yet ready for that. But I did offer to rent it to him, with the option to buy if I later decide to sell. He's agreed, so I'm here to ask if any paperwork needs to be completed."

"I'm sure you're relieved the cabin will be occupied by someone you know will take good care of the property."

"Brian also said he'd care for the horses, which really relieves my mind."

"Sounds like it's a win-win situation." Then addressing Kate's question, the lawyer said, "I know you and Brian are friends, but it's always good to

have everything in writing. I'll drop in tomorrow, so you can sign the paperwork, then I'll catch Brian at the newspaper. No sense wasting time, as I expect you're anxious to get everything finalized so you can start to move on."

Kate left the lawyer's office feeling stressed because of what she had to do next. It was the thing she most dreaded, but she knew it could no longer be postponed or avoided.

## CHAPTER 3

**B**ob Hanes was the special agent in charge of the FBI's Denver division, a job he had held for the past nine years. He had a thick crop of silver hair, an expanding waistline, and a distain for slackers and ass kissers. He might look like the proverbial grandfather, but he was no pushover. He demanded excellence from his staff and had a longstanding reputation for backing his agents. Kate considered him to be the ideal boss, as well as a close friend.

Greeting her with a tight bear hug, he shot her a concerned smile.

"I hope this visit doesn't mean you're planning on an early return to work. You might be my top agent, Kate, but I can make do without you for a few more days."

He sat down at his desk, while she took the seat opposite him. "I really appreciate you letting me have so much time off, Bob. Being able to spend that time with Jake...well, it was a gift."

His brow arched. "Thanking me over the phone would have saved you the trip, so I'm guessing there's another reason for your being here."

"I forgot how good your radar is," she said with a nod. "There's something I need to tell you, but I'd prefer the discussion not take place here."

He checked his watch. "Give me a half hour, then I'm yours."

She spent the time in her office, sorting through her mail when she was not staring out the window or visiting with cohorts who dropped by. By the time Bob found her, she was as edgy as a racehorse in the starting gate.

He held the door for her as they exited the building. “Thought we could order a pizza and eat it at my place. I’m sure I can scrounge up a bottle of wine to go with it.”

She followed him in her vehicle to the Cherry Creek condo building he had moved into following his divorce, an unfortunate byproduct of his working in a high-pressure job that had demanded too much time away from his family. His designer kitchen had a slate floor, granite countertops, a double wall oven and cook top, but only the microwave and built-in wine racks – and sometimes the dishwasher – ever got used. Mostly he dined in restaurants, or ordered in.

She made a beeline for the leather sofa in the living room. The room had a lofty ten-foot-high ceiling, real hardwood floor, gas fireplace, and offered an optimum view of the Rocky Mountains and the Mile High City.

They were waiting for the pizza to be delivered, and she was almost finished her second glass of the Stags’ Leap merlot when she finally felt ready to talk about the contents of the box. Bob didn’t interrupt her as she told him about the bloody shawl, the lock of hair, the photograph and the paper with the mysterious numbers.

When she was finished, she met his gaze. “It’s like my mind’s on a roller coaster ride. One minute I’m thinking I’ve inherited evidence to a murder, the next I’m convinced it’s a case of overactive imagination. As enforcement officers, we’re taught to be objective. I don’t seem to be able to do that with this. My love for Jake keeps getting in the way.”

“I presume you brought everything with you?”

“It’s in the trunk of my car.”

“Go and get it, but we won’t look at it until after the pizza arrives.” He smiled lopsidedly. “Wouldn’t want to scare the delivery guy with gory evidence. He might demand a higher tip.”



Bob was seated at his computer desk in a spare bedroom he had turned into an office. His shirtsleeves were rolled back, and he was peering at her

over the rim of his half-frame readers. Both he and Kate had donned plastic gloves so as not to compromise the evidence more than it already had been from her and Brian's previous handling of it. They had switched to drinking coffee to keep their minds clear.

He had inspected the shawl and agreed that the stains resulted from blood splatter. Now he was studying the photograph of the woman and the lock of hair.

"We'll be able to get DNA from the hair even though there are no follicles, but as you know, the downside of using mitochondrial DNA is that it's passed on from the mother, so if you pluck three pieces of hair – one from the mother, one from the son, and one from the daughter – they'll all be identical."

"I know it can't determine who is who, but it may be enough to link the hair with the shawl," she said.

"I'll shoot everything you gave me over to forensics." He raised an eyebrow. "I'm presuming you're okay with me doing that?" She nodded. "Good. In the meantime, I don't want to scan original evidence before I give it to forensics, so I'll photograph it and put it into the system right away. That way, we'll get the ball rolling."

"You'd better photograph this, too," Kate said, removing the pendant to give it to him. "It was in the box, along with the other items. Until it's proven to be evidence to a murder or other wrong doing, I intend to go on wearing it."

"Okay. But first I'll see if I can retrieve any fingerprints from it."

"You'll find plenty of mine and Brian's, as well as those of the jeweler who polished the pendant."

"And also, your father's," Bob added. "More than likely, the polishing erased all traces of earlier prints..." He shrugged. "But I might get lucky and find one."

While Bob photographed the items and tested the pendant for fingerprints, she continued trying to make sense of the mysterious numbers. Her scratch pad was marked with her attempts. Initially she had added 40.684708 and 105.4500. Then she had tried subtraction. Nothing had made sense. Not one to leave a job unfinished, she divided and multiplied the numbers, but the results put her no further ahead.

She grunted. “I don’t know why I’m racking my brains when Einstein’s so much better at this.” Einstein was the nickname of Jeff Williams, a computer nerd in charge of the division’s computer analysis and response team.

Bob nodded. “I’ve already sent him an email. It’ll be waiting for him when he arrives at work tomorrow. As for the pendant, I couldn’t get any clear prints, but the photo I took of it might prove valuable. It’s in the system now.”

He handed the pendant back to her and set the box with its contents on the corner of his desk, presumably as a reminder for him to take it to work. Then he checked his watch. “Since it’s almost midnight, you might as well bunk here.”

“I can’t. Ali’s been confined inside all day, so I have to get back to the cabin. And I’ve a meeting with my lawyer in the morning to sign the paperwork concerning renting the cabin to my friend.”

Bob escorted her to her car.

“Will you let me know as soon as you learn anything?” she asked.

He held her gaze for a long moment. “Kate, you do know that once the process is set in motion as it has been, it can’t be halted. If it turns out a crime was committed, and Jake was responsible, I can’t keep something like that secret.”

She squeezed his hand.

“I understood that before I came to you.”



Despite her late night, she had been up at the crack of dawn. The cabin had to be made ready for Brian, so she had gone through each room assessing what needed to be packed up, and then stowing it in boxes. Since most of her possessions were at her Denver apartment, and she had dealt with most of Jake’s, there were only a few boxes by the time she had finished. A quick call to Brian about what to do with Jake’s books had relieved her mind when he

told her she didn't have to pack them away if she didn't mind him reading them when time allowed.

Frank arrived before noon with the paperwork but declined her lunch invitation because he still had to see Brian, followed by a busy afternoon in court. With all necessary tasks having been completed and her mind needing a diversion from troubled thoughts, Kate packed her kayak in the back of her Jeep after lunch, and set out for the Sleeping Elephant campground, which was close to the put-in spot to do a five-mile river trek on the Cache la Poudre.

She was manually transporting the kayak to the river from the campground's parking lot when her cell phone rang. She ignored it, but the caller was persistent, so she set the kayak down and dug out her phone. When she saw Bob's number on the display, her heart skipped a beat.

"Where are you?" he asked in a tone that usually meant trouble.

"I was about to kayak the river, but I've a feeling my plans are about to change."

"How long will it take you to get back to the cabin?"

"About fifteen minutes. Why?"

"There's a hostage situation in Wyoming, at the FAA's radome site atop Medicine Mountain. I need you to be the negotiator. I'd send someone else, but the HT refuses to talk to anyone but you. The Black Hawk's on its way to pick you up. ETA's about twelve minutes."

"I'm heading back now. I'll call you once I'm on the road. Should be about five minutes." She called him back in six. "Do we have an ID on the hostage taker?"

"Negative. But he asked for you by name."

"You'll want to pull all my files. If he knows me, chances are there's a connection to one of my cases."

"The files are being pulled as we speak," Bob said.

"Do we know how many hostages and who they are?"

"Negative."

"Who's the CO?"

"Mike Farrell."

"Good. It'll make my job easier. He knows how to command. We work well together."

“Mike can give you the latest updates during the flight.”

“I’m at the cabin now and the chopper’s waiting,” she said, and ended the call.

Farrell was waiting for her on the veranda. He had a spit-and-polish appearance that pegged him for the ex-military man he was. She caught the wafting scent of rum from the thin, filtered Vendetta cigar that was as much a part of his attire as the razor-sharp crease in his pants and the mirror-shine of his shoes.

