

# CHAPTER 1

## And so, it Begins – Jane Doe



The semi-conscious woman whimpered as her attacker choked her into unconsciousness. Hours later she awoke in the dark deserted alley covered in blood—her blood. Without moving she made a mental check of her body. Blood oozed from a wound in her side and her arms were covered in defensive wounds. Her left eye where he had dealt the first blow was swollen closed and her throat hurt like the devil. Her face felt like it had lost the battle with a

cheese grader. The stench of blood emanated from her long matted hair and the palm of her right hand was a mangled mess.

She had fought for her life like a cornered tiger, clawing at the concrete for anything to use against her attacker. Her hand closed around the neck of a broken bottle. She screamed as she wrapped her hand around it and slammed it into her attacker's face, ripping it open from his eye to his chin. He howled and cursed as he choked the life from her.

She could deal with the cuts, the crushed larynx, and the facial disfigurement. He had removed her shoes, unbuckled her leather belt, pulled her jeans down to her ankles and molested her. She was glad she had been unconscious and had not experienced the revulsion of Baird on top of her.

She clutched the monogrammed pocket she had ripped from his shirt. It was drenched in blood. She knew where to find him. He should have killed her because she would hunt him down and slowly destroy him.

She screamed as she tried to sit up and knew he had broken her ribs. Crawling slowly, she inched to the brick wall and clawed her way into a standing position. Broken glass cut her bare feet as she stumbled along the alley wall. A twenty-four-hour emergency clinic was three blocks away. She was determined to reach it, determined to survive, determined to make his life a living hell.

She stumbled through the clinic doors and collapsed in the entrance way. She was aware of gentle hands lifting her onto a gurney before everything slipped into darkness.

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The beeping sound and clean sheets told her she was in the hospital. She tried to open her left eye and whimpered as additional pain shot through her head. The effort was too much, and she let darkness overtake her once more.

She lost all track of time as she drifted in and out of the blackness that helped her cope with the pain. Her head ached

as she tried to identify the voices in her room. She listened as two women discussed her condition.

“She is lucky to be alive,” a soft voice said as its owner changed the bag hanging from the IV pole. “She could easily slip into a coma. Someone beat the hell out of her. She has concussion, broken ribs, and deep cuts in the palm of her hand and side. Her face is a mess. It looks like her assailant carved it up with broken glass.”

“Was she sexually assaulted?” a calm, confident voice asked.

“Yes, but she fought back hard. From the shape she was in when she collapsed inside the emergency room doors, I am certain her attacker meant to kill her in the end. I’d bet money he left her for dead.”

“Did she have any identification on her?”

“No, nothing. We admitted her to the hospital under Jane Doe. Whoever she is, I hope she has a lot of money because she is going to need extensive reconstructive surgery to make her look human.”

# CHAPTER 2

## Seven Years Later



Hope Ford walked her last customer of the day to the door and closed it behind him. She was glad he was gone. It always made her uneasy when she was the last person left alone with a stranger. She turned off the main library lights leaving on only a few nightlights.

Hope jumped as a loud bang echoed throughout the library when a heavy book fell from a shelf. Following protocol, Hope left the entrance doors unlocked and entered the safe room that housed cameras covering every row of

shelved books. She scanned each camera to make certain that no one was hiding in the library. For some reason, it had become a rite of passage for teenagers to dare each other to spend the night in the two-story building with all its books.

Her hand covered her mouth as she watched a figure slowly shuffle from the back of the room toward her safe place. It appeared to be an injured woman. Without hesitating, Hope called 911 and requested a policeman and an ambulance.

She retrieved the Kimber .380 pistol from her purse, locked herself in the security room, and watched the stranger pull herself along the shelves of books. She had almost made it to the reading area when she collapsed. Hope fought the urge to run to her but remained in her locked room. At five feet four inches, the hundred-twenty-pound brunette, had always been hesitant to rush into harm's way.

Lieutenant Montgomery (Monty) Masters pushed open the library door and was delighted it was unlocked. *Hope actually followed protocol*, she thought.

The five-foot nine-inch red head was rarely spooked by anything, but the eerie silence of the cavernous library made a chill run down her spine.

She carefully surveyed the voluminous room and spotted the body of a woman sprawled between two shelves.

"Hope, are you okay?" She called out to the librarian as she waved at the surveillance camera aimed at the entrance doors. The lock on the safe room door clicked and Hope poked out her head.

"Monty, thank God it's you." She hurried to the lieutenant and pointed to the woman. "I don't know who she is or why she was in the back of the library. I discovered her when I checked to make certain everyone had left."

As the emergency medical technicians followed behind her Monty carefully approached the woman and nudged her with her foot. She dropped to her knees when the woman moaned. "She's alive!"

Monty checked the pockets of the woman's blazer and found her wallet.

"Her name is Rachel Lancaster. It looks like someone beat the hell out of her."

"Is she from here?" Hope asked as the EMTs loaded the unconscious woman onto their gurney.

"Her drivers license has an Oklahoma City address."

Monty pulled cards from the victim's wallet. "There's a receipt from the Fairfield Inn here in Oklahoma City dated today. It has a room number on it. If she lives in the city, I wonder why she was staying at the inn. I'll pay the Fairfield a visit and see what I can find out."

"Take me with you," Hope's eyes sparkled. "I've read a thousand mysteries that begin just like this, but I've never actually been involved in one."

Monty studied the petite woman for a few seconds. "It never hurts to have the company of a beautiful woman." She smiled. "Do you mind if we have dinner first? I haven't eaten all day. I need to call this into the office and let them know I'm going to notify the next of kin after dinner. I also want to know if a missing person's report has been filed on her."

"I am hungry," Hope admitted.

"I'll need copies of your security video to figure out when she came into the library and if anyone followed her," Monty said. "May I pick them up in the morning? I'll also need to close down the library until our forensic folks do their examination."

"Give me a few minutes and I'll download today's video onto a flash drive for you and post a closed sign on the door."

"Sometimes you are too good to be true, Hope Ford."

## CHAPTER 3

### Rachel Lancaster



Monty studied the victim's driver's license as they waited for the server to bring their dinner order. "Lancaster is a very familiar name," she commented.

"You know Bluebaird is running for Governor of Oklahoma."

Monty smiled. She knew Hope was using a play on words. "You mean Bluebeard?"

"You know, Baird Lancaster. He has that thick black beard. It is so black it looks blue. He thinks he looks like

Abe Lincoln. He was the district attorney who refused to prosecute the criminal that raped that teenager at church camp.”

Monty nodded. “I remember, the man claimed the girl begged him to have sex with her.”

“Yeah,” Hope smirked. “That’s what twelve-year-old church kids do.”

“I know for a fact that the family withdrew the charges after the rapist paid them off.” Monty informed her.

Hope huffed. “I guess even a daughter’s virtue has a price now days. Do you think there is any chance Baird will be elected governor?”

“Who knows. Enough money will buy anything. I try to stay out of politics when at all possible.”

Monty called her sergeant and informed him that she was following up on the Rachel Lancaster case.

“Something you should know Lieutenant. Rachel Lancaster is the wife of that guy running for governor,” Sergeant Bobby Randle informed her.

“Baird Lancaster?”

“Yeah. The press has dubbed him Bluebaird. He comes from old money. He is a womanizer and had half a dozen assault charges against him in college. It looks like his father paid off people right and left to keep him out of jail.”

“I’ll check on Rachel in the hospital then pay Baird Lancaster a visit. I’m assuming he hasn’t reported his wife missing.”

“Not a peep.” Bobby replied. “I’ve pulled his rap sheet. I’ll leave it on your desk.”

“Thanks, Bobby. I appreciate that.”

Hope raised a questioning brow as Monty ended her call. “This may be a domestic violence case,” she informed the librarian.

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Beautiful Rachel Lancaster had learned all the makeup secrets necessary to cover a black eye. She was accustomed to being slapped around and degraded by her powerful husband. She knew he would be furious if he learned she was in the hospital. Sometimes she wished he would kill her and put her out of her misery.

Even before the honeymoon was over, she had learned how unpredictable her new husband's temper could be. She was shocked at his demands for rough sex. Something she despised. He seemed to enjoy beating her into submission.

When she returned home after her honeymoon, she immediately went to her parents' house to tell them she was going to divorce Baird. Both of her parents were appalled that she would leave the man being groomed for the governor's job in their state.

"He is abusive," Rachel had cried. "He has a horrible temper."

"You must be careful not to irritate him, dear," her mother had counseled her. "He will be governor one day and you will be the first lady of Oklahoma."

"I don't care about any of that. I just want to be safe. I fear for my life, Mother. He is nothing like the image he projects to the public."

"I'm sure you are overreacting to being a new bride. Some women are shocked by the things their husbands ask them to do." Jane Brighton had insisted as she poured her daughter a glass of wine. "Sip this. It will calm you down. You don't want to do anything drastic. You could cause Daddy to lose his trucking contract with the state. That would be devastating for our company."

Rachel had resigned herself to living in hell and stayed away from Baird as much as possible. She knew he had affairs with other women, and she was glad. *Better them, than me*, she thought.

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