

Anstice had a two-bedroom apartment in the Atrium. A converted part of the enclosed Fairlane mall. On her apartment balcony, which overlooked a garden promenade, she listened to the staccato beat of the rain on a glass roof. Still, in a white shirt and gray slacks of her uniform, she kicked off her flats, sipped her drink, and rolled the ample glass of iced scotch over her forehead. It didn't last. The buzzing of her phone reminded her a deputy chief's life is not her own. She took another sip and checked the phone. It was the Atrium's security APP. She had a visitor who wanted to come up.

She opened the APP's front door video. "Mace, what are you doing here?"

Mace in the rain speckled dark suit held a bottle high. "Have something to share. McGregor Reserve."

"You sure?"

"I'm here, aren't I?"

Accepting the deputy chief position seemed a hot point with Mace a week ago; now, the stars were on her collar. How will he react? She asked herself.

Doesn't matter, my life, my decision.

"Unit three ten." She said and buzzed him into the building. A few minutes later, he was at her door.

Standing there, fingers of unruly black hair fell down his forehead, and a scruffy beard spoke a disarming unruliness that she found attractive.

"I take it this is not business." She said.

"Peace offering. I'm going stir crazy in my apartment."

Anstice smiled and stepped aside. "Come in then."

She had a few visitors but was proud of her apartment. Contemporary furnishings, low back mauve sofa and chairs, simple end and coffee tables inlaid with complementary colored tiles.

"Nice place," Mace said handing her the bottle. "You moving in or moving out?"

"Excuse me?"

"No pictures. Usually means one or the other."

"Haven't decided."

They moved to a gray marble breakfast bar that framed one side of the kitchen. Mace braced himself on the edge of a stool as Anstice broke the seal on the scotch, and noting the stars on her collar, said, "I see you took it."

"Yes. It gives me leverage, a lot more as deputy chief than detective Sargent." Anstice poured their drinks, straight up, and handed a glass to Mace. "Don't read anything else into this. It doesn't change who I am."

Mace raised his glass and then took a sip.

Anstice debated leaving it there. Mace didn't seem to be avoiding the issue. What her promotion represented, her relationship with Haleef. But she wanted him to trust her. She could see only one way for that to happen.

"Not that I owe you an explanation, but—"

"It's okay. You're right. You don't owe me anything."

"Well, I want you to know why. I took the promotion. I took it to protect myself... from my past."

Mace settled himself on the stool. "Okay, I'm listening."

"Haleef didn't come to my office to get a case update. He came to blackmail me."

"Blackmail? How?"

"It's about my time in Detroit. I was in investigative operations, robbery, theft, minor crimes mostly. I was new to the job, idealistic, everything was black or white to me, within the law or breaking it. I uncovered a pay-for-play ring. High-value robberies never solved for a cut of the insurance money."

"Did you take it to the brass?" I asked.

"I was about to when deputy chief of ops, Lieutenant Gageby, called me into his office. Laid out a trail of evidence framing me as the person behind the scheme. Admitted it wasn't true, but pointed out there would be a lot of he said's against one she said. So, it wasn't a reduction in force that pushed me out, it was leave quietly, and they wouldn't bring charges. They're still holding that over my head. Somehow Haleef found out."

"What did Haleef want?"

"For me to reinstate Bishara."

“And did you?”

“I have him doing a block of administrative courses in Lansing, will buy me some time.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me this?” Mace asked.

“I wasn’t sure where we were.”

“Are you now?”

“No, but I know now where I want to be.”

Anstice sipped her drink, looking over the rim, studying Mace for a reaction. He was staring back; she saw uncertainty.

“So back to you, Mace, what are we celebrating, tears, or cheers?”

“Don’t know. That’s a judgment for hindsight. I just wanted to talk. Anything new on the McCrary case?”

“Only that I requested a DNA retest on a John Doe in Detroit.”

“Oh, right, that was just before I found out John Doe had been identified, and with no family, they cremated him. That was quite a Friday, included a long talk with Helyn before I left.”

Anstice stared at Mace. “Do I want to hear this?” Then realizing what she said, she touched her fingers to her lips and then said, “Forget I said that. Please. Let’s move to the sofa. It’s practically virgin.”

Mace refreshed his drink before moving to an over-stuffed chair. Anstice sat on the adjoining corner of the sofa.

“Well, maybe this is something you didn’t want to hear, or perhaps you do.”

“Spit it out, Mace.”

“Helyn has found someone else, says she is serious now. Encountering you at my townhouse was her tipping point.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Mace. I thought it—“

“It’s all good. I wouldn’t take it back.”

“Is that going to affect your working relationship with Helyn?”

“Not much of that left,” Mace said, “but I don’t think it will. She made it clear she was the forensic coordinator. But that’s not all. I don’t know if it has worked its way back to you, but Helyn discovered Herodias was pregnant.”

“Pregnant? Was it Aiden?”

“No, and there was no DNA match in the system.”

“Then why did Haleef say Aiden raped Herodias?”

“That’s what I’ve been asking myself.”

“You said they got an ID for the John Doe. Who was he?”

“That’s more bad news, Jirair Houssain. And they found his DNA on empty methanol can a half-mile from the McCrary crime scene. Only thing is he has been dead for five years.”

“Jirair Houssain, should I know that name?”

“Perhaps not, but he was my prime suspect for the Vulcan, five years ago.”

“Why is that bad news?”

Mace looked away, hesitating for a moment, but then told Anstice about chasing Jirair to the roof of the Mo-Town Apartments, and his conversation with Al.

“Do you think you killed him?”

“That’s just it, I think I might have, but it is not a conclusion I can accept.”

“Who knows about this?”

“Helyn and you, now. Gavin has been pulling bits out of me for the past few days. Claims he is investigating the death of Jirair and wanted to know what I knew about it. Thing is, I think he knows more, maybe the whole story, what actually happened.”

Anstice grabbed Mace’s glass and took her own to the bar. Added ice this time and refilled both. She handed back Mace’s drink. “Why do you think Gavin knows more than he is saying?”

“Something Al said and something Gavin said. Apparently, kids raise a ruckus on the roof of the Mo-Town chasing pigeons. At one time, there was a roost there and they seem to continue to return. Al said one of his tenants heard a flight suddenly take off the night Jirair fell from the roof. Gavin said something curious about that. If it hadn’t been for all the flapping, I would have heard Jirair’s admission.”

"He was there," Anstice said.

"Yes, he was. And he suggested he had a strong case against me. Then something weird happened."

"This is not bizarre already? A dead man linked to a murder."

"Gavin wasn't investigating the death of Jirair Houssain, at least not officially. Detective Sam Bellettiere closed it as a cold case. Labeled it a suicide."