

CHAPTER 1

[SATURDAY, MAY 6]

The rain was relentless. One or two days would be a lot in May, but how long had it been now? Five days? Six? Jenna lost track. All she knew was that when she woke up in the morning, it would be another long day of dark, dismal weather. She couldn't remember when she last saw the sun, and she was beginning to resent the pitter-patter of raindrops on her window.

The radio alarm clicked on and the announcer sounded just as depressed about the weather as she felt. He was predicting yet another day of this, and her whole spirit sank deep into the covers again. She had been dreaming, not pleasantly, about being in a boat that was breaking up, a pirate ship, like you would see in "Pirates of the Caribbean." The crack of timber, the rolling... Ah! That was probably thunder she heard for real. The boat, of course, was not real.

She made herself get up, shower and dress. She used to be afraid to take a shower during a thunderstorm, but really, how does one go for days without a shower? She finally had to risk it, and realized she survived, so now it was not a threat. Whether it *should* have been was immaterial to her. Her dark hair fell long and straight. She liked it that way. She didn't like to mess with her hair.

The lights were out in the kitchen, even though she tried the

switch several times. Why in the kitchen but not upstairs in the bedroom? She didn't know. Didn't matter. It was light enough that she could find the flashlight and make her way down the basement stairs to the fuse box. Sure enough, it was a breaker. At least that was easy to fix.

Upstairs, she started a pot of coffee and toasted a bagel out of habit. Then she remembered that it was Saturday and she didn't have to work, so she made herself another bagel and sat down with her coffee. Coffee. All things are better with coffee. It wouldn't take long and the caffeine would kick in and she could start this dreary day. She closed her eyes and let the steam from the cup warm her face and hands. That brought a smile to her face and a big sigh.

Jenna lived alone in her house, quite content with life. She had never been married and wasn't looking to get married. If it happened, so be it, but she wasn't going to waste away her life hoping and waiting for that to happen. She was prettier than she realized, especially when she smiled, because that's when her hazel eyes twinkled. She didn't spend a lot of time with make-up and skin care and yet she glowed with an inner beauty that any other woman would envy.

She had a master's degree in business administration and worked as a secretary in a large investment firm. She had been with the firm since graduating from college. She was supposed to have her own company by now, but there had been a lot of dead ends. She liked what she did, so she remained at the firm for the time being.

So here she was, all dressed for work and no place to go. Shoot. She could have saved herself the effort. Oh, well. Might as well think of something to do all gussied up, or go upstairs and

change. She changed into jeans and a cozy sweater, and her fuzzy slippers. No use changing into shoes until need be. Maybe later she would venture out, but for now, another cup of coffee and TV news ought to do it.

The news is never good. Why is that? Another accident, another crime, another political mess, and bad economic news. She could have predicted that without watching a half hour of it. The rain was usually the lead story, as if one couldn't tell just by looking out the window. She wondered if people were really hoping to accomplish something on a day like today.

Her phone rang in her pocket and Jenna swiped it before seeing who was calling. "Rise and shine," the voice sang. People often say that to people who are not so ready to get up and be cheerful.

"Hi, Mom," Jenna said without enthusiasm.

"How are you today?" This is always how her mom started out.

"So far, I'm fine, but pretty soon, I'm going to get out of bed and then we'll see."

"Very funny. What have you got planned for today?"

"Not a thing."

"Good. I'll be right over." Click.

Good grief, Jenna thought. The day has hardly started and already I have to deal with it. Where's my coffee? Jenna and her mom, Virginia, did everything together, but there were times when such closeness was a bit too much for Jenna. Like today. I'd rather just cozy up with a book and call it a day, she mused.

"What's up?" Jenna asked her mom as soon as she came in the door.

"I am just soaked, just running from the car to the house," said Virginia, shaking the rain from her curly blond hair. "How did Noah stand it?"

"Who?" Jenna asked with scrunched eyebrows.

"Never mind. I have a great idea. What do you think about taking a little trip?"

"What kind of little trip?" Jenna asked with skepticism.

"Oh, I don't know. Atlanta?" Clearly, her mom was trying to be nonchalant about some scheme.

"Mom, Atlanta is two hours away. Why so far? And what are we going to do in Atlanta?" said Jenna, knowing her mother had something up her sleeve.

"We could be there by lunchtime. Go shopping. Maybe see a movie." She paused before going on. "Look, Jenna. I'm bored, you're bored. Why sit around in the house all day looking at the weather? We don't have to let that silly old rain dictate our life, do we?"

Jenna looked at her for a moment, then smiled. "I guess not. Okay. I'm in." That brought a dimpled smile to Virginia's face.

Jenna's mother, Virginia, had recently been widowed a second time. Jenna's father, Walter, died of cancer when she was just a toddler. She never really knew him. Virginia bravely carried on, raising her daughter without him, with only the help of good friends, but she managed. And then she met Robert when she was about forty years old, and Jenna was thirteen. Virginia and Robert married five years later. A year ago, Robert was killed in a car

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