

# Chapter 1

Human flesh freezes at seventy degrees below zero. At least Kerry remembered reading that on some obscure Web site. The five below temperatures in Chicago that January morning might have been safe, but she decided not to risk freezing ears, toes, or other body parts as she ventured out to dump the trash.

A week of bitter wintry air blew in off Lake Michigan and made life tougher for everyone, including Chicago's Finest. Average citizens complained about the bone-chilling weather but police considered it an obstruction of justice. An arctic chill of that scale stiffened muscles and numbed fingers. Even wearing specially lined gloves, they could find themselves unable to draw, no less fire a weapon.

Kerry hadn't planned to fire her gun, but she had dressed to meet the enemy. Two inches of pink flesh showed between her wool hat and a wool scarf wrapped several times around her face. The tall, lean police detective braced herself to run twenty feet from the back door of her apartment building to the dumpster.

Her original plan had been to drop the overflowing trash bag from her third floor kitchen window, but after a little thought,

decided against it. If the garbage overshot its target by an inch, she would spend more time outside picking up debris than had she carried it down.

She wedged the back door open with a board for a quick return and crunched cautiously over frozen slush to toss the bag. As she turned away, her eyes caught a shape that took a second to register. Amid the sparse collection of trash, she spotted a naked body.

From the few exposed parts, Kerry guessed it was a woman lying on her stomach. Her quick glance at the purple blue skin did not entice the detective to jump in for a closer look, but she couldn't take a chance that the woman was still alive.

As she hoisted herself over the edge of the steel container, it rumbled, a noise that echoed in her chest when she removed her glove to find a vein. Kerry had encountered enough dead bodies to know that her fingers rested on something more than the cold flesh of a recently deceased human. The woman had been dead for a while but below-freezing temperatures slowed decomposition and lessened the smell of decaying flesh.

The garbage truck picked up the previous day. If the depositor had buried her deep in a rubbish filled dumpster, she would have gone into the truck unseen. Instead, someone tossed her in an almost empty container and left her uncovered. They may have hoped that new garbage bags would fill it

again by the following day. Not many people looked in the bins when they threw their trash. With good reason.

Until recently, Kerry's long legs could carry her up or down a flight of stairs in a hurry. A car accident a few months earlier broke her right leg in two places, and to her displeasure, slowed her down. Everything had healed, but it forced her to climb with caution. Caution and patience were not natural to Detective Grant, especially when she had to call her discovery into the station.

Once she made the call, Kerry grabbed an additional scarf for her head, and returned to the alley to wait for the responding unit.

“Do you always go dumpster diving for bodies on your day off, Detective Grant?”

The uniformed officer took a nervous step back as Kerry growled behind her scarves. She stifled an all-out attack because everyone at the Twenty-third, and a few outlying precincts, knew she found more excitement on her days off than most cops did on duty. The cases Kerry and her partner, Mike Sullivan, usually handled were more likely to turn up a stolen credit card than a dead body. They worked fraud and computer crime.

She pulled the layers of scarf from her face and read the name pinned to his heavy blue overcoat. “Not intentionally, Officer Kazak. Tell whoever's in charge to keep me informed.

I need to go inside, I'm frozen stiff." She grimaced at her remark and offered a silent apology to the body.

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Chicago winters taught people to appreciate their cozy dwellings, whether a studio apartment in a building of sixty studios, or a palatial North Shore home. When you had heat, electricity, and running water, you couldn't want more. Unless, of course, the cupboard was bare.

"Damn." Kerry cursed her personal frigid wasteland and slammed the freezer door. Even the ice cubes had shriveled up in their blue plastic trays. The detective admittedly lacked homemaking skills and found herself in trouble when her supply of frozen dinners ran dry. Normally that wasn't a problem. She ran to the store a few blocks away and filled a bag with all things microwavable. Today she had no desire to return to outside air colder than her empty freezer.

She pressed a speed dial button on her phone. "Hey, Jen, have you eaten?"

"Veronica and I had dinner a little earlier. What's going on?" Jennifer Kincaid and Kerry Grant were inseparable friends in high school, but lost contact for twenty-five years. They recently reunited, and Jenny's life changed considerably since reconnecting with her old pal.

Kerry explained about the body she found. "So you can see why I don't want to go back out."

“Kerry, you and I have lived the same number of years on this planet and I have yet to happen upon a dead body. How many does this make?”

“I don’t know. I don’t keep track.” Kerry kept her voice low, but it was frosty as the great outdoors. “Besides, I’m a cop. I’m bound to run into one or two. And there’s no need to remind me that I found a few off duty.”

“I wasn’t even thinking about it.” Both women knew that Jenny lied. “If you want to come by for roast beef, mashed potatoes and broccoli, you’re welcome. I make extra on Sunday so I’ll have plenty of leftovers during the week. As badly as I feel for you, Kerry, I don’t deliver.”

Kerry dropped the hand with the phone in her lap and sulked. The accident that broke her leg, and a few other parts of her body, also destroyed her classic BMW. She still hadn’t replaced it, which made navigating the city more than a minor problem. She wasn’t a fan of public transportation, and walking was not an option because it took too long to get anywhere.

Choosing new wheels became trickier. She couldn’t decide whether to go for sport or safety. At forty-four, she found herself leaning towards safety, and wasn’t at all pleased. Unfortunately, her damaged body was a constant reminder. She touched the lump on her nose that she’d earned slamming into the steering wheel. Her 1972 beamer was *sans* air bags.

Kerry punched in another number. “Hey, Marty, have you eaten yet?”

“No, I was about to sit down. Why?”

“I seem to be out of food and don’t want to have to go out again if I can avoid it. Do you want to share whatever you were about to eat?”

“Kerry, it’s below zero.”

“It’s warm here.”

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“I can’t believe you talked me into this. It’s a hundred below.” Kerry held the door and didn’t interrupt Marty’s exaggerated weather report. He held up a crock-pot and waited for her to take it. When she didn’t, he pointed at it with his chin. “Do you want to grab this while I take off a layer or two?”

She scanned the good-looking private investigator and reached for the pot. She’d considered telling him to take off as many layers as he wanted, but hunger reigned. “Here, I’ll take it to the kitchen. Does it need to go on the stove?”

“You’ve never cooked in a crock-pot?” Marty stared as he untied his outer scarf. Kerry watched the large pot carefully on the way to the kitchen and told him she hadn’t. He followed still tugging off outerwear. “You have to plug it in.”

“Ah, that explains the cord.”

“Do you ever eat anything but frozen foods?”

“Sure, I eat carry-out or order pizza, and, of course, I’ve eaten a good percentage of those ninety-nine billion hamburgers.”

“That’s another reason we should move in together. I’m not a terrible cook, and that’s a lot more than you can say. Wouldn’t you like regular meals?”

“What’s this?” Kerry lifted the lid and studied the contents, avoiding his trick question. “The orange thing’s a carrot, right?”

“Give me a second here. I haven’t quite recovered from your never having seen a crock-pot.” He took a breath. “You’re over forty years old and absolutely delighted to identify a vegetable? A carrot no less. It’s your basic stew.”

Marty hauled his clothing to the living room and threw everything on the couch. “When you called, you said you couldn’t face going out again. What happened earlier?”

“I found a body in the dumpster. Do we need bowls or plates to eat this?”

“Bowls.”

At five eleven, Kerry easily dug through the top shelf and located two bowls. They didn’t match, but she figured that’d work because the spoons didn’t look much alike either.

“You find bodies fairly regularly, don’t you?”

“Where do you want to eat? Coffee table or counter?” Kerry didn’t want to have another conversation about her skill at finding bodies.

Two stools sat in front of the counter separating the kitchen and living room. “It’d be easier to clean the counter.” She stretched her arm over the top ready to sweep the stacks of mail and magazines to the floor until she saw the stunned

look on Marty's face. *Why does he think we could live together? He's neat.* Kerry picked up the clutter and relocated it to an empty chair in the living room.

While she made space to eat, Marty found a roll of paper towels and brought it, and the bowls and spoons to the counter. A short but fruitless hunt for a soup ladle convinced him to scoop stew into their bowls with a cup.

"This is good. You made it, huh?" She took another spoonful and looked at him. Marty's hair, normally as straight and blond as Kerry's locks, was now a coppery red. Vanity didn't make him dye it as much as the better part of valor. He needed to be discreet.

"It's not hard. You cut the ingredients into pieces, throw them in the crock-pot, and let them cook. Whose body was it, do you know?"

"No, a woman, but I didn't investigate beyond checking to see if she was alive. If I hadn't taken out my trash, I wouldn't have found her. That'll teach me to try to be a neat person."

Kerry watched Marty do a quick scan with a smirk on his face and was glad he kept his comments to himself.

"Have the reports come back yet?"

"I told them to have the detectives contact me. Did you bring your laptop?"

"No, I brought the crock-pot. Were you thinking about playing CyberCop?" She flashed a smile. "I'd much rather we play that cops-and-robbers game you taught me the first time we said goodbye. A computer wasn't necessary if I

remember.” He reached over, pushed Kerry’s short hair behind her ear, and laid his fingers gently on the back of her neck.

They met the previous year while working undercover. The two law officers finished their assignments and Marty resigned from the FBI to start his own detective agency. Both detectives continued their struggle to find a place where they were comfortable in their relationship.

The dum-da-dum-dum of the Dragnet theme from Kerry’s phone interrupted them. She uncovered it mid da-dum. “Grant.”

“Detective Grant, this is Detective Stern. I’m handling the Jane Doe you found.”

“What do we have?”

“She was about twenty-eight at the time of death, and died of heart problems. The ME said he couldn’t tell exactly when that happened. He explained what he thought was going on, but none of it made sense to me.”

“Why couldn’t he tell when she died?”

“The body was frozen.”

“I know it was frozen, Detective. It was five below zero in and outside the dumpster.”

“No, Kerry, her body was frozen before it went in the dumpster.”

“You mean she was in a freezer.”

“Not in a freezer, but she was frozen. There was no blood in her body, only glycerol, and doc said that’s a cry-o-protectant.” He read one syllable at a time. “It’s used in cryonics”

“Isn’t cryonics where they keep people frozen in a cylinder and wake them up when they can cure whatever killed them?”

“That’s what it is. I’m trying to contact companies in the area who offer cryonic services to see if they’re missing a client. The closest one’s in Michigan if I remember right.”

“That’s a good plan. Keep me updated on this, Stern.” Kerry hung up and leaned on her hand to look at Marty. “Did you hear that?”

“Yes. It has all the elements of a bad science fiction movie. Let’s not discuss frozen bodies, Kerry. I’d rather discuss warm ones. What about that cops-and-robbers game?” He pushed his bowl away with a grin when she held up her gold detective’s shield.