

Dream Caller

Prologue

“It’s so freaking cold,” she murmurs, stomping through the icy street. She looks ahead at the lit sidewalk along the road, then contemplates the snow-blanketed field to her left. “Screw it. I’m taking the short cut.”

Her white parka and boots blend with the frozen ground as though she’s a disembodied pair of Levis tromping through the slush-filled ravine. The crunch-crunch of her steps is the only sound in the frigid night.

She stops, looks behind, then ahead. “Shouldn’t have come this way, it’s so damn creepy.” She moves on, then stops. Moves. Stops. An eerie game to see if the echoing footsteps quiet the same moment hers do.

“Who’s there?” Picking up the pace, she turns and walks faster, but so does the echo. She starts to run.

“Hailey.”

When she stops and sees him, her breath shudders out with relief. “Holy crap, David. You scared the hell out of me. I almost peed myself.” Retreating back to where he stands, she puts her arms around his waist and kisses his neck. “I’m sorry we fought.”

She stares up at him, but her apology is met with silence. “You’re still mad?”

His silence continues.

“I’m sorry, David. I didn’t want to do it there. I mean, a frat party? I love you, but can’t we do better for our first time?”

“Our first time? Doesn’t that figure?” He steps closer and shakes his head. “You have no idea, Hailey. I’m going to do so much better.” Gently, he brushes a finger down her cheek.

“You’re still drunk. Your eyes look really weird,” she teases. “I see you found your coat and hat.” She crinkles her nose. “Yuck. You need to wash it. It smells like that smoky, stinky frat house.”

He glances around. “I thought you’d stay on the street, take the long way home.”

“I know you worry, but it was so late, and I was tired and cold. After our fight, I just wanted to go home. Walk me the rest of the way?”

He nods, but as she turns to walk on, he fists his hand into her hair and yanks her back.

“Ow. What the hell?”

He spins her around. His fist connects with her cheek, then her jaw, and she drops to her knees.

“David?”

“You should be mine,” he screams, then he lowers his voice as if realizing his mistake.

“All of this, every fucking thing here should be mine. You’re just one more blonde reminder of how unfair this fucking world is.”

“I am yours. What are you talking about? We’ve been together every day since school started. How could you doubt the way I feel about you?”

“I don’t doubt it, Hailey. And it’s exactly the reason you’ve got to die.”

Chapter 1

When attempting a normal relationship, it was vital to appear normal. Jordan Delany reminded herself of the new mantra she'd adopted the day she'd said yes to moving in with Tyler McGee.

But as she lay on the wooden floor of their new bedroom, unable to move and shivering from the latest dream, three things became abundantly clear. First, the ceiling could use a fresh coat of paint. Second, she didn't have a snowball's chance in hell at pulling off normal. And last, it sucked to be thirty. Scraping herself off the floor wasn't coming nearly as easily as it had at twenty.

Forty was going to be a bitch.

As a St. Louis narcotics detective, she often crossed paths with drugs, violence, and murder. In addition, she had the handy-dandy ability to connect with spirits of dead victims through her dreams. So she had no grand illusions of ever making it to fifty. At least there was that.

Her legs needed more time to steady before she stood. This she knew from years of experience. Her skin was damp with sweat, and the cold air in the room made her shudder. Recognizing the trembling as her system's attempt to warm itself after she witnessed a young woman die in the snow, she went with it, let the sensations swallow her. Fighting the tremors only prolonged the time her body needed to recover from a dream.

She closed her eyes and let the details of the latest vision solidify.

This dream had been different from most. Usually the victim was the focus.

Their fear.

Their adrenaline.

Their struggle for life.

And yes, she had felt all that. She'd seen the girl's long blonde hair and petite build.

But the odd thing was how clearly she'd seen the attacker. Usually a faceless shadow was the best she had to work with. Not this time. His shaggy, curly blond hair was as crystal clear as his pretty hazel eyes. He was tall and lean, with the athletic build of a swimmer.

The girl had known her attacker. Trusted him, even. Walked to him and wrapped her arms around him. Maybe that was why she could see him so vividly. The young woman had been in love with the young man who killed her.

Hard to be *that* wrong about someone.

She thought about her own romantic relationship. Ty had asked her to move in with him. How long would it be before he'd admit to being wrong? Quite simply, although he knew more about her than anyone else ever had, he hadn't lived with her long enough to understand the insanity that went along with her visions.

He knew she dreamed. He knew the dreams often contained visions or messages about a case she was involved with. And he knew her darkest secret—those messages came from the dead.

Surprisingly, he loved her, anyway.

So she worked out a doable standoff with death. During the day she blocked all spirits. In turn, they came any damn time they pleased at night in her dreams.

Granted, not a perfect solution, especially with her attempting a relationship for the first time. But the mutual understanding between her and the dead worked.

She no longer feared Ty leaving because of the violent nightmares she endured. Although every dream he *didn't* witness was a point in her "normal" column.

This morning, Ty had been called away on a murder investigation. She hadn't been happy that their much-needed vacation had been cut short, but there was an upside. The murder had kept him from witnessing another doozy of a dream. Yet if he *were* there, he'd have lifted her off

the floor and taken her back to bed. The thought of what he might have done after that sent a small spear of warmth through her shaking body

Something shifted beside Jordan. Startled, she gasped. The gasp had been neither cop-like nor Jordan-like, a clear sign she hadn't recovered from the images in the dream. The shifting hairball whined and inched closer.

"I'm okay, Beauty."

Having a pet was as new to Jordan as was living with a man. In less than a week she'd gone from a lifetime of being solo to having two roommates. She slung an arm around Beauty, a yellow Lab stray that had collapsed on their property after a run-in with a coyote.

One of Beauty's ears looked like it had been through a shredder. Half of her body was shaved in a willy-nilly pattern that resembled random crop circles. Yet despite being esthetically challenged, the dog had a kind spirit and soulful eyes that rivaled Ty's. Particularly when it came to wrapping around Jordan's heart. A fact she didn't intend to admit to either one of them.

"All right, let's get up, girl."

Beauty stood in a flash despite having twenty-four stitches in assorted spots on her body. Jordan didn't move nearly as fast.

"I don't suppose I could train you to fetch me a blanket and my journal?"

Beauty tilted her head, looking puzzled.

"Didn't think so. But you probably need to potty, huh?"

Now Beauty gave her the *duh* eyes.

"Okay, we'll pee and get coffee. Can you operate a Keurig?"

The dog wagged her tail with confidence.

"Good, let's go. Momma needs a little caffeine."

Hopefully, there would be time to journal the dream before she was called into work because a vision like the one she'd just had could only mean one thing.

A new case was on the horizon.

Tyler McGee pulled to a stop on Blueberry Street, more commonly referred to as “fraternity row.” He grabbed gloves and a couple of essentials from his truck and moved in the direction of the crime scene tape.

An hour before, he’d been wrapped around Jordan, another week of vacation stretching out before him. Now he was freezing his ass off in a late winter snow, about to take a look at a dead body.

The officer stationed outside the tape was one he knew well. His brother’s best friend, Caleb Jones.

“Hey, Jonesy. How you doing?”

“Better than our victim, that’s for sure,” Jones returned.

“Bad one?” Ty asked. “Let’s have it.”

“We have an ID from two sorority sisters. Victim is Hailey King, nineteen-year-old female student in Lincoln University’s nursing program. Her roommates got worried when she didn’t return last night. Said it wasn’t like her. So early this morning they decided to backtrack to the frat house where they all partied last night. There’s a ravine right over there.” Jones pointed behind the sorority house. “Rather than walk around the block, the kids use it as a cut-through between houses. They found the victim in the center of the ravine.”

Ty looked over to where Jones pointed. “They touch the body?”

“Big time. Said they thought maybe she had too much to drink and passed out or something. Sounds like they didn’t even let the fact that she could be dead enter their minds. She was face down, so they shook her and then turned her over. When they saw her bloody face, they realized it was too late. You would think two nursing students would know better than to touch all over a victim like that, but I guess they didn’t.”

Spoken like a man who'd never happened upon the dead body of someone he cared about.

“Composure and common sense mean nothing when you're in denial. Training and rules . . .” Ty shook his head. “. . . mean nothing if your heart thinks you can bring them back, even if deep down you know differently.”

Jonesy visibly cringed, and Ty was pretty sure the bell had finally gone off in his head. Ty had stood over his sister's dead body, and he wouldn't have given two shits about procedure or logic if he thought he could have brought Tara back.

“Sorry, man. I didn't mean to say something stupid.”

Ty worked up a smile. Jonesy was a good cop and knew all too well what had happened to Tara. “You didn't say anything stupid. Just cop-like. I better get to it.” Ty pulled on his rubber gloves.

“Uh, you might want to hold up a minute.” A big grin spread across Jonesy's face. “You know that saying about a woman being a *brick*”— he did a mild hip thrust—“*house?*”

Ty narrowed his eyes.

“Let it filter through your mind as you turn around.” Jonesy slapped a hand against Ty's shoulder. “Then enjoy the view. You got company, dude.”

Ty squeezed his eyes shut. *Hell no* was his first thought.

He did an about-face and watched the saucy little redhead from Missouri Highway Patrol arrow straight for him. His second thought: *If there is a gracious God in this world, please don't allow this woman and Jordan to ever, ever cross paths.*

“Why, Tyler McGee.” The new arrival met his gaze with equal parts humor, confidence, and—he was pretty sure—revenge woven into her sultry smile. “Fate has brought us together again.”

Be professional. Act like nothing happened. Ty nodded, pulled off the glove, and offered a handshake. “Isobel, nice to see you.”

“So you do remember my name? I thought maybe you couldn’t look me up because your memory was bad.” She glared at his outstretched hand. “Surely you can do better than a handshake, McGee.”

“Oh, well, I, uh . . .” *Nope. Not going to be okay.* What the fuck was he supposed to say? “So I guess you got an early call today, too? You made it in record time.”

“Your chief called mine, said there was a murder. I was told you were on vacation.” She shrugged. “I was closest, so I came. No big deal. You guys always need us for all the lab work, anyway.”

“Listen, Isobel, if this is going to be a problem—”

“Relax, McGee.” She laughed. “You’re not the first or the last guy I’ve slept with who’s forgotten how to use the phone the next day. I knew the score going in: likely to be one night only. It’s fine.”

He relaxed a little; she didn’t appear to be out for blood. Nobody ever accused him of being a saint, but no female could ever accuse him of being less than respectful. Or of casually mixing business with pleasure. *Except* for Isobel Riley. She’d caught him on a particularly bad night on both counts. “I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings. I had a lot to drink after a grueling case. I probably wasn’t thinking clearly.”

“I worked that case, too, Ty. I remember it well.”

She gave him a smile that he just *knew* was going to cause trouble with Jordan.

“We should probably get to work.” She headed toward the crime scene and then turned back. “Although you did get the sex, so I think the least you could do is buy me a meal when we’re done here.”

Yep. Fucking trouble with a capitol T.

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