

Chapter 1

She would chide herself later, in retrospect. She should have seen him. She should have known something was wrong. At the very least, she should have expected it. But Reverend Janet Polasky had not even suspected anything was amiss. And Hanna Miller paid the price for that failure.

The first clue was a glint of sunlight, reflecting off the driver side window of an aged, faded red pickup truck as the door opened. Janet only caught the light out of the corner of her eye. Her attention was focused on Hanna, who appeared to be searching for something in her purse as she wandered across the parking lot. The woman seemed to be oblivious to the world around her.

Reverend Polasky leaned against the passenger side of her late model Subaru as she waited. But movement from the left caught her full attention. Hanna's estranged husband, Todd, was storming toward the hapless wife, his hands in his jacket pockets. His glare was focused on the unsuspecting woman.

"Hanna! Watch out! Hanna!" Janet screamed as she ran toward the woman.

Hanna looked up and locked gazes with Janet. Then she noticed the man striding toward her. She froze.

"Run, Hanna!"

But Hanna did not. She stood like a deer in the headlights of a car.

Todd pulled his right hand from his pocket. In it he held a handgun. Never slowing, he raised his arm and fired three shots.

Hanna dropped where she stood, blood erupting from her chest.

It was Janet's turn to freeze. Her mind refused to register the horror she had witnessed. She stared at the body on the ground for a few seconds. As she turned her attention to the shooter, he

turned his to her. He brought the gun around slowly, pointing generally in her direction. But his eyes... they seemed vacant, as though seeing nothing. He stood motionless for a moment before placing the muzzle of the gun against his own head and firing. Blood sprayed and Todd Miller fell where he stood.

Although it all seemed to have played out in slow motion, thinking back, Janet was sure that it had taken no more than five or ten seconds—so little time for the world to change completely. What was at one moment a young woman trying to find her way to a new life became a lifeless body on the parking lot pavement. And the killer could not be held to account. He had chosen to join his estranged wife in violent death.

“Did he say anything?” Detective Deidre Martin sat, pen in hand with a small notepad open in front of her.

Janet struggled to pull herself together. Her emotions—grief, anger, resignation, and whatever else lurked inside—roiled through her soul. “What?”

“Did he say anything?”

“Uh, no. I don’t think so. He just walked, like a crazy man, he stared at her but didn’t say anything. And then he just shot her.” Reverend Polasky shook her head, her eyes searching the detective’s face for some sense of meaning. “How does someone do that?”

Dee shrugged. “It happens more than you might think. You didn’t say... what were you doing here?”

Janet rubbed her hands together as she tried to focus her attention. “Hanna asked me if I would go with her to see her attorney. She was filing for divorce and wanted some support.” A tear trickled down her cheek. “I didn’t see him. I was just...”

“Was she a member of your congregation?”

“Yes. She used to come every Sunday. She hadn’t been in a while and I hadn’t heard from her until she called, out of the blue, yesterday. She was at her mother’s house.” Janet’s heart skipped a beat. “Oh my God, what about Abby?”

“Abby?”

“Abigail, their daughter. I assume she is with Hanna’s mother. She doesn’t know yet.”

“How old is she?”

“I think she’s around ten.”

Dee closed her eyes and shook her head. “This is going to be a tough conversation.”

“Do you want me to talk to her?”

“I have to go over and officially notify the family, but, yeah, if you would be willing to come along, it might help.”

Janet held young Abby in her arms as the young girl sobbed. Her grandmother sat in silence, staring at her hands folded in her lap.

“What do we need to do now?” The question came softly and laced with pain.

Dee put her hand on the woman's shoulder. "I am so sorry, Missus Klein." She cleared her throat. "There will be an autopsy, of course. After that, they will release the body. You can have it transferred to whichever funeral home you choose and go from there."

"What about *his* body?" The question was filled with anger and hatred.

"I don't know. If no one claims it, then the City of Bellevue will handle it. I can't say for sure what they'll do."

"He didn't have any family here. They're all down in Mississippi. That's where he was from."

Janet listened to the back and forth, still numb from her experience. Back in the corners of her mind, she wondered what would become of Abby. How does a ten-year old absorb this much tragedy? "I assume that Abigail will stay here with you?"

"Yes." The word fell flat. There was no warmth or humanity there. "I told her to be careful. I told her that he would do something. I told her...."

Janet had no words.

Dee spoke up again, "I'm going to have Children's Services give you a call. They can help you with Abigail."

The woman, still dry-eyed, nodded but said nothing.

"Missus Klein, is there anything the church can help you with? Anything you need me to do?"

"I guess maybe Hanna needs a funeral."

"Of course." Janet smoothed Abby's hair as she spoke. "If it's okay with you, we'll bring some food over this evening. And if you need anything at all, please call."