

Chapter One

When Lieutenant Eve Dallas strode into the bullpen of Homicide after an annoying appearance in court, she wanted coffee. But Detective Jenkinson had obviously been lying in wait. He popped up from his desk, started toward her, leading with his obnoxious tie of the day.

“Are those frogs?” she demanded. “Why would you wear a tie with piss-yellow frogs jumping around on—Christ—puke-green lily pads?”

“Frogs are good luck. It’s feng shui or some shit. Anyways, the fresh meat you brought in took a pop in the eye from some chemi-head down on Avenue B. She and Uniform Carmichael hauled him and the dealer in. They’re in the tank. New girl’s in the break room with an ice patch. Figured you’d want to know.”

Fresh meat equaled the newly transferred Officer Shelby. “How’d she handle it?”

“Like a cop. She’s all right, LT.”

“Good to know.”

She really wanted coffee—and not crap break-room coffee, but the *real* coffee in her office AutoChef. But she’d brought Officer Shelby on board, and on her first full day she’d taken a fist in the eye.

So Eve, tall and lanky in her black leather coat, walked to the break room.

Inside, Shelby sat drinking crap coffee, squinting at her PPC while wearing a cold patch over her right eye. She started to get to her feet, but Eve gestured her down.

“How’s the eye, Officer?”

“My kid sister hits harder, Lieutenant.”

At Eve’s finger motion, Shelby lifted the patch.

The bloodshot white, the black and purple raying out from it had Eve nodding. “That’s a nice one. Stick with the patch awhile.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good work.”

“Thank you, sir.”

On the way to her office, she stopped by Uniform Carmichael’s cube. “Run it through for me.”

“Detectives Carmichael and Santiago caught one down on Avenue B. We’re support, just crowd control. We spot the illegals deal going down, five feet away. Can’t just ignore it, but since we’ve got a body coming out, we’re just going to move them along. Dealer? He’s hands up, no problem. Chemi-head’s jonesing some, and he just punched her. Sucker punch, sir. She took him down, and fast, I’ll give her that. A little bit on the reckless side, maybe, but it’s her eye his fist punched. We hauled them both in, with Assaulting an Officer added to the dooper.

“She can take a punch,” Uniform Carmichael added. “I’ll give her that, too.”

“Keep her tight for a few days, and let’s see how she rolls.”

Before somebody else wanted her for anything else, Eve cut straight through to her office. She programmed coffee, black, without bothering to take off her coat.

She stood by her skinny window drinking the coffee, her whiskey-colored cop’s eyes scanning the street traffic below, the sky traffic above.

She had paperwork—there was always paperwork—and she’d get to it. But she had just closed an ugly case, and had spent the morning testifying over another ugly case. She supposed they were all ugly, but some twisted harder than others.

So she wanted a minute with her coffee and the city she’d sworn to protect and serve.

Maybe, if she was lucky, a quiet night would follow. Just her and Roarke, she thought. Some wine, some dinner, maybe a vid, some sex. When a murder cop ended up with a busy, billionaire businessman, quiet nights at home were like the biggest, shiniest prize in the box.

Thank God he wanted those quiet nights, too.

Maybe sometimes they did the fancy bits—it was part of the deal, part of the Marriage Rules in her book. And more than sometimes he worked with her over pizza in her home office. The reformed criminal

with the mind of a cop? A hell of a tool.

So maybe a quiet night for both of them.

She set the coffee on her desk, took off her coat and tossed it over her deliberately uncomfortable visitor's chair. Paperwork, she reminded herself, and started to rake her hand through her hair. Hit the snowflake hat she tried not to let embarrass her. After tossing that on top of the coat, she finger-combed her short, choppy cap of brown hair, sat.

"Computer," she began, and her desk 'link sounded.

"Dallas."

"Dispatch, Dallas, Lieutenant Eve."

Even before the rest, she knew the shiny prize would have to stay in the box for a while.

With her partner, Eve walked from Sixth Avenue where she'd double-parked her DLE.

With a scarf of purple-and-green zigzags wrapped around her neck, Peabody clomped along the path, shooting unhappy looks at the snow blanketing everything else.

"I figured, hey, we'd be in court, and we got temps in the forties, I can wear my cowgirl boots no problem. If we've got to go tramping through the snow—"

"It's January. And what cop wears pink to a murder trial?"

"Reo had on red shoes," Peabody pointed out, referring to the APA. "Red's just dark pink when you think about it."

When Eve thought about it, she wondered why the hell they were talking about footwear when they had three DBs on tap. "Suck it up."

She flashed her badge when they came to the first police line, kept walking—ignored reporters who pushed against that line and shouted questions.

Somebody had their head on right, she decided, holding the media hounds back out of sight of the rink. That wouldn't last, but it kept what was bound to be complicated a little simpler for the time being.

She spotted more than a dozen uniforms coming or going and at least fifty civilians. Raised voices, a

few edged with hysteria, carried clearly.

“I thought we’d have more civilians, more witnesses.”

Eve kept scanning. “Bodies drop, people run. We probably lost half of them before the first-on-scene got here.” She shook her head. “Media doesn’t need to get within camera range. They’re going to have dozens of people sending them vids.”

Since nothing could be done about that, Eve set it aside, flashed through the next barricade.

As she did, a uniform peeled off, lumbered toward her. She recognized the thirty-plus-years vet, and knew the relative order established was due to his experience and no-bullshit style.

“Fericke.”

He gave her a nod. He had a dark bulldog face on a broad-chested bulldog body. And eyes of bitter chocolate-brown that had seen it all, and expected to see worse at any moment.

“Hell of a mess.”

“Run it through for me.”

“Got the first dispatch at ’round fifteen-twenty. I’m baby-walking a rook, and had him doing some foot patrol on Sixth, so we hotfooted it. Had him start a line back away, keep people out. But Christ on a crutch, you can’t block the whole freaking park.”

“You’re first-on-scene.”

“Yeah. Nine-one-ones started pumping in and so did cops, but people were already running from the scene when I got here. Had to work with park security to hold what we could. Had some injuries. We got MTs in to treat the minors, but we had a kid, about six, broken leg. The way the wit reports shake out—once you cut through the crap—is the first vic collided with him and the kid’s parents, and the kid’s leg got broke in the fall. Got their contact info, and the hospital for you.”

“Peabody.”

“I’ll take that information, Officer.”

He reeled it off without pulling out his notebook.

“Sweepers aren’t going to be happy about the state of the crime scene. People all the fuck over it, and

the bodies've been moved around. Had a medical on the ice, and a vet—an animal doc—and they worked on the vics, and the injured.

“First vic took it in the back. That’s the female out there, in red.” He turned, gestured with a lift of that bulldog chin. “Wit statements aren’t clear about which got hit second, but you got two males, one gut shot, one between the fucking eyes. Looks like a laser strike to me, LT, but I don’t wanna tell you your job. And you’re going to hear from some of these wits about knives and suspicious individuals, and the usual crap.”

You didn’t make lieutenant without wading through, and learning to cut through, the usual crap.

“All right. You got the doctors on tap?”

“Yeah. Got them inside the locker room, got another couple in there, too, who claim they were the first to reach one of the male vics. And the wife of one of the male vics. She’s firm he was the last hit, and I lean toward that.”

“Peabody, take them, and I’ll start on the bodies. I want the security discs, and I want them now.”

“They got them ready for you,” Fericke told her. “Ask for Spicher. He’s rink security, and not altogether a dickhead.”

“I’m on it.” Peabody headed off, careful to avoid the snow.

“Gonna want some grippers for your boots,” Fericke told Eve. “Pile of them up there. Hotshot murder cop face-planting on the ice wouldn’t inspire confidence.”

“Hold the line, Fericke.”

“It’s what we do.”

She walked around to the rink’s entrance, strapping on a pair of the toothy grips before opening her field kit and sealing her hands and boots.

“Hey! Hey! Are you in charge? Who’s in fucking charge?”

She glanced over, locking eyes with a red-faced man of about forty who was wearing a thick white sweater and black skin pants.

“I’m in charge.”

“You have no right to hold me! I have an appointment.”

“Mister . . .”

“Granger. Wayne Granger, and I know my rights!”

“Mr. Granger, do you see the three people lying on the rink?”

“Of course I see them.”

“Their rights trump yours.”

He shouted after her as she worked her way across the ice to the female victim, something about police states and lawsuits. Looking down at the girl in red—couldn’t have been more than twenty years old—Eve didn’t give him another thought.

Blood pooled under her, spreading more red on the ice. She lay on her side, and Eve could clearly see bloody marks where other skaters, and the medicals, had gone through.

Her eyes, a bright, summer blue, already glazed with death, stared, and one hand laid, palm up, in her own blood.

No, she didn’t give Granger and his appointment another thought.

She crouched down, opening her field kit, and did her job.

She didn’t rise or turn when Peabody came out.

“Vic is Ellissa Wyman, age nineteen. Still lives with her parents and younger sister, Upper West. TOD, fifteen-fifteen. ME will determine COD, but I agree with Fericke. It looks like a laser strike.”

“The doctors—both of them—agree. And the vet? He was an Army corpsman, so he’s seen laser strikes. They didn’t do more than look at her—she was obviously gone. One tried working on the gut shot, and the other examined the head shot—but they were all gone. So they focused on the injured.”

Eve rose with a nod. “Security discs.”

“Right here.”

Eve plugged one of the discs into her own PPC, cued it to fifteen-fourteen, and focused first on the girl in red.

“She’s good,” Peabody commented. “Her form, I mean. She’s building up some speed there, and—”

She broke off when the girl shot through the air, form gone, and collided with the young family.

Eve rewound it, backed up another minute, and now scanned the other skaters, the onlookers.

“People are giving her room,” Eve murmured, “some are watching her. I don’t see any weapons.”

She let it play through, watched the second victim jerk back, eyes widening, knees buckling.

Ran it back, noted the time. Ran it forward.

“Less than six seconds between strikes.”

People skated to the first vic and the family. Security came rushing out. And the couple skating—poorly—along the rail—slowed. The man glanced back. And the strike.

“Just over six seconds for the third. Three shots in roughly twelve seconds, three dead—center back, gut, forehead. That’s not luck. And none of those strikes came from the rink or around it. Tell Fericke, when he’s got all names and contacts, that anyone who has given a statement can go. Except for the medicals and the third vic’s wife.

“Get a full statement from all three of them, and contact whoever the vic’s wife wants. The female’s cleared for bagging, tagging, and transpo to the morgue. And we need park security feeds.”

“Which sector?”

“All of them.”

Leaving Peabody gaping, Eve crossed the ice to the second victim.

When she finished with the bodies, she went inside.

The two medicals sat together on a bench in a locker area, drinking coffee out of go-cups.

Eve nodded to the uniform, dismissing her, then sat on the bench across from them. “I’m Lieutenant Dallas. You’ve given statements to my partner, Detective Peabody.”

They both nodded, the one on the left—trim, close-shaven, mid-thirties—nodded. “Nothing we could do for the three who were killed. By the time we got to them, they were gone.”

“Doctor?”

“Sorry. Dr. Lansing. I thought, I honestly thought the girl—the girl in the red suit, had just taken a bad spill. And the little boy, he was screaming. I was right there, that is, right behind them when it happened. So I tried to get to him, first. I started to move the girl, to get to the little boy, and realized she wasn’t hurt

or unconscious. I heard Matt shouting for everyone to get off the ice, to get clear.”

“Matt.”

“That’s me. Matt Brolin. I saw the collision—saw that girl go into her turn for a jump, saw her propelled forward into the family. I was going to go help, then I saw the guy go down, saw him drop. Even then I didn’t put it together. But I saw the third one, I saw the strike, and I knew. I was a corpsman. Twenty-six years ago, but it doesn’t leave you. We were under attack, and I wanted people to get to cover.”

“You two know each other.”

“We do now,” Brolin said. “I knew the third guy was gone—hell of a sniper strike, but I tried to do what I could for the second one. He was still alive, Lieutenant. He looked at me. I remembered that look—and it’s a hard one to remember. He wasn’t going to make it, but you’ve got to do what you can do.”

“He shielded the guy with his own body,” Lansing put in. “People panicked, and I swear some would’ve skated right over that man, but Matt shielded him.”

“Jack had his hands full with the little boy, and the parents got banged around some, too. Right?”

“They didn’t have time to break their own fall,” Lansing explained. “The father’s got a mild concussion, the mother’s a sprained wrist. They’ll be all right. The boy, too, but he got the worst of it. Security had a first aid kit. I gave him a little something for the pain. The MTs were here inside of two minutes. You have to give them credit. I went to help Matt. And we had to try on the last one. But like Matt said, he was gone. Gone before he hit the ice.”

“Nothing to do but do some basic first aid on people who’d taken falls or cut themselves on blades—skates,” Matt added. He scrubbed a hand over his scruffy gray beard. “It wasn’t until they put us in here that it came back to me. You’ve got to put it away when you’re working.”

“Put what away?”

“The fear. The fear you could take a strike in the back of the head any second. Whoever shot those people? They’ve got skills. It came from the east. The strikes.”

“How can you know that?”

“I saw the third hit. Saw the angle, the way the guy was turned. From the east.” His eyes narrowed on

Eve's. "You already knew that."

"I reviewed the security discs. We'll reconstruct, but at this point I agree with you."

"His wife's in the office over there, with your partner. Her parents just got here." Brolin heaved out a breath. "This is why I went to veterinary school when I got out of the Army. Dogs and cats? Easier to handle than people."

"You handled people just fine. Both of you. I want to thank you for what you did here today. We have your contact information if we need to talk to you again. You can reach me at Cop Central if you need to talk to me. Lieutenant Dallas."

"We can go?" Lansing asked.

"Yes."

"How about that beer?"

Brolin managed a weak smile. "How about a couple of them?"

"First round's on me." Lansing pushed to his feet. "People come here to enjoy the park, to take their kids for a little adventure. Or like that girl, for the joy. She was a pleasure to watch. And now . . ."

He broke off, shook his head. "Yeah, first round's on me."

As they went out, a man and a woman with security badges on lanyards, stepped in.

"Lieutenant Dallas. I'm Carly Deen, rink security, and this is Paul Spicher. Is there anything else we can do. Anything?"

"Who's head of security?"

"That would be me." Carly, no more than five-two and a hundred pounds, lifted her shoulders. "People assume it's Paul. He's the muscle." She said it as a joke, struggling to smile.

"Okay. We're going to have to keep you closed down until further notice."

"We've already taken care of that. The media's bombarding the main 'link, but we've put it on record—just your standard 'The rink's closed.' One of them managed to get my personal number, but I've blocked it."

"Keep doing that. I need you to keep off the ice. You and any of your staff, until that's cleared. Crime

Scene techs will come in shortly. Did you know any of the victims?"

"Ellissa. Ellissa Wyman. She's here almost daily during the season. She was going to try out for this skating troupe." Carly lifted her hands, dropped them. "She was nice. Friendly. She'd bring her kid sister sometimes."

"I knew Mr. Michaelson, a little," Paul added.

Second vic, Eve thought. Brent Michaelson—doctor—age sixty-three, divorced, one offspring.

"From here?"

"He liked to skate, would take an afternoon. Every other Tuesday. Nothing fancy, nothing like Ellissa, but he was a regular. Once in a while he'd bring his grandkids—evenings or Saturdays for that. He liked the solo in the afternoons. I never saw the other guy before."

Paul glanced toward the office.

"The one whose wife's in my office," Carly added. "Your partner's with her. She's good with her. Is there anything we can do for you, Lieutenant?"

"Give us your office for a little while more."

"As long as you need."

"I'm sure my partner asked, but so will I. Have either one of you noticed anyone coming around, either to skate or to watch, anyone who seemed too interested in Ellissa or Brent Michaelson?"

"Not like this. A lot of people hang around longer when Ellissa's skating. And there've been a couple of boys off and on who hit on her. But nothing over the top. We keep an eye out," Carly continued. "We don't have a lot of trouble. Pushy-shovies, your basic collisions."

"More trouble at night, but even then." Paul shrugged. "You get an asshole who starts a fight. Sorry about the *asshole*," he added.

"I'm rarely sorry about assholes," Eve commented. "We'll be in touch when you're clear. I'd advise your brass to coordinate with the police liaison on a statement. Timing and content."

"They're—the brass—they're going to be in a spin about lawsuits."

"The brass always is," Eve said, moving to the office.

Inside, a woman in her early thirties sat in a folding chair, flanked by a man and a woman. Each had an arm around her while Peabody crouched on the floor, talking softly.

Peabody took the woman's hand when Eve entered. "Jenny, this is Lieutenant Dallas."

Jenny looked up with devastated eyes. "We saw the vid. Alan really liked it. "You look like you did in the vid. I mean like the actress did. I don't know what to do."

"I'm sorry for your loss, Mrs. Markum. I know Detective Peabody has already talked to you. If I could just have a few more minutes."

"We were skating. We're terrible skaters. And we were laughing. We were taking the whole day together, and tonight, too. It's our anniversary. Five years today."

She turned her face into the man's shoulder.

"They had their first date here." He cleared his throat, but it didn't clear the faint Irish accent that made Eve think of Roarke. "I'm Liam O'Dell, Jenny's father. This is Kate Hollis, her mother."

"It was my idea, the skating. Let's do everything we did on our first date. It was my idea to come here, like we did that day. We both took off work, and we were going to get pizza afterward, just like we did on our first date. That's when I was going to tell him why I wasn't having wine like we did then. I was going to tell him I'm pregnant."

"Oh. Oh, baby." Her mother drew her in close so they clung and shuddered together. "Oh, my baby."

"I was going to tell him, then we were going to tell you and Daddy and Alan's mom and dad. But we were going to have today, all day."

As Peabody had, Eve crouched so she was eye level. "Jenny, who else knew you'd be here today?"

"Sherry, my friend, and I think her guy—Charlie. They're our friends. I told Mom. We really just decided a couple days ago. I pushed for it when I took the test and it was positive."

"Did Alan have any enemies, anyone he had trouble with?"

"No. No. Detective Peabody asked, and just no. People like Alan. He's a teacher. We're teachers, and he helps coach soccer, and, and volunteers at the homeless shelter. Everyone likes Alan. Why would anyone hurt him? Why?"

“We’re going to do everything we can to find out. You can contact me or Detective Peabody anytime.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“You should go with your mom.” Liam leaned over, kissed her head. “Go home with your mom now.”

“Daddy—”

“I’ll come. I’ll be there.” He looked over her head to Kate, got a teary nod. “Go with your mom, darling, and I’ll be coming right along.”

“Peabody.”

“Come with me. We’ll have an officer take you home.”

Liam sat where he was as Peabody led them out.

“We’re divorced, you see, and Kate, she’s married again. Eight years. Or is it nine?” He shook his head. “But such things don’t matter a bit now, do they?” As he rose, he cleared his throat again. “He was a good man, our Alan. A good and stable man who loved my girl with his whole heart. You’ll find who took him from her, from my girl and from the baby inside her.”

“We’ll do everything we can.”

“I saw the vid, and read the book as well. That Ilove business. You’ll find who took the life of this good young man.”

Eyes blurred with tears, he hurried out.

Eve sat, took a moment to clear away the grief that hung so thick in the air. Then pulled out her ’link.

“Lowenbaum.” SWAT commander—the best she knew. “I need a consult.”

“I’m getting rumors about Central Park.”

“I’m confirming them. I need an expert consult.”

“And to think I was going off tour. I can be at the rink in—”

“Not the rink, not yet. I’ve got security feed, and I need a good screen. My place isn’t far from here. Can you come there?”

“The Dallas Palace?”

“Bite me, Lowenbaum.”

He laughed, then just grinned at her. “Yeah, I can come there.” The grin faded. “I get conflicting numbers on vics.”

“Three. And it’s my sense it could’ve been a hell of a lot worse.”

“If it can get worse, it usually does.”

“That’s why I need the consult. I think it could get worse. I have to do the notifications. Can you be there in an hour?”

“Can do.”

“Appreciate it.”

She clicked off as Peabody came back.

“I need you to go to the hospital—or check and see if the kid with the broken leg and his parents are still there. Wherever they are, go there. See what they saw, write it up. I’ll do the notifications.”

“I’m still working on the security feeds. It’s a big park.”

“Have them sent to my home and office units. We can start with sectors east of the rink. Have them sent to your home and office units, too. I want you to study them—get McNab to study them. You flag anything or anyone that looks off. If this came from inside the park, we’re looking for an individual with some sort of bag or case.”

“If?”

Eve stepped out of the office, scanned the empty locker room. “Because I’m betting it came from outside the park. We’re going to be looking at buildings with west-facing windows, starting with Sixth, working east until Lowenbaum tells me to stop.”

“Lowenbaum?”

“He’s coming in to consult. I want this rink feed on my screens at home, with equipment that doesn’t argue with me.”

“Lowenbaum. He’s so cute.” At Eve steely stare, Peabody hunched her shoulders. “I’m with McNab through and through, but I can see cuteness through my eyes and my Cute-O-Meter. You have to admit, he ranks high on the Cute-O-Meter.”

“Cute’s for kids and puppies—if you’re into kids and puppies. I’ll give you he’s frosty enough.”

“Completely. I’ll push on the security feeds, and see if I can find anything new from the kid and his parents.” As she spoke, Peabody began to rewind her long scarf. “We’re going to be wading through piles of wit statements.”

“Take the first ten. I’ll start on the rest. Let’s see if we can find anything that connects the three vics other than a visit to the skating rink. And let’s hope we do. If this was pure random, it’s already gotten worse.”

As she stepped outside, Eve looked over the heads of the sweepers busy working on the scene, and stared east.

Again she thought: It could get a lot worse.